

The future of electronic entertainment issue#126
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Black & White 2,
Rome: Total War,
Reviewed: EyeToy,
Tomb Raider: Angel of
Star Trek: Elite Force II,
Plus: how to get a
14 games you never
The mod scene
What happens when gamers build games?





To many, not too long ago, the concept of gamers being capable of creating better games than professional, organised development teams would have seemed laughable. But it's happened. And, crucially, what is wonderfully apparent is that it's happening with increased regularity and proficiency.

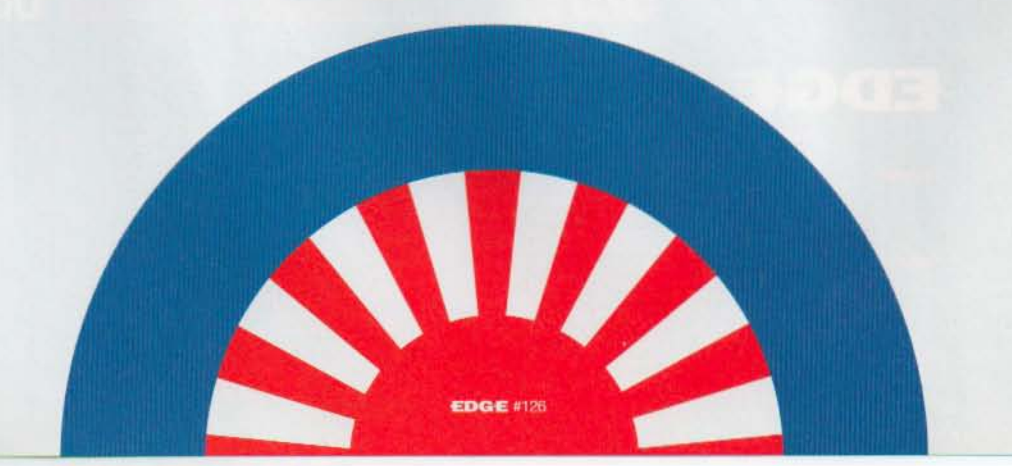
Certainly, publishers have recognised the importance of building a mod community around their titles as a way of securing superior commercial performance and have adapted their strategies accordingly – it's little coincidence that many of the most successful recent PC titles offer their own toolsets as part of the package.

It's a particularly interesting time for the homebrew scene. The quality and scale of today's efforts now surpass the capabilities of the individual modder, increasingly requiring team-based efforts. The parallels with videogaming's own evolution won't escape you.

To some, particularly those with acute knowledge of the industry, this notion of 'professional, organised development teams' will seem as amusing as the thought of consumers making games: as exposed in this month's Indecent Proposal feature on how to pitch a concept (the first in a series looking at the various stages of game creation), professionalism isn't always rife within the industry.

Of course, getting your game signed is no guarantee that it will be released. History is littered with projects – ranging from basic technical demos to fully fledged code ready for duplication – that have unsuccessfully negotiated the erratic nature of the publishing model. This month we remember 14 such casualties.

On the subject of unpredictability, **Edge** did go to Japan as promised last month, but the software we were looking for wasn't to be found. But while there we did visit the offices of Tecmo and Koei, two of the country's most promising game makers. Fittingly, one of them was started by a lone bedroom programmer.



Features











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Regulars

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"You worried about saving your own skin?"
"Yeah, I am. It covers my body."

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Ace in the hand

Gaming on the go used to be for kids, but rapid improvement in technology means handheld entertainment is shaping up to be the next battleground of hardware domination

As defined by the writer Malcolm Gladwell in his book on the subject, a tipping point is a situation where small changes in environment, culture or technology completely overturn the status quo. Or as the book's strap states: 'How little things can make a big difference'.

It's certainly the case with mobile gaming technology. Incremental improvements in a range of areas such as system-on-chip silicon, cheap 3D hardware, screen design and battery life have combined to fuel a boomtime for the industry. The most obvious demonstration of this tipping point has been the entrance of Sony with its PSP (aka PlayStation Portable). PlayStation creator Ken Kutaragi's view has always been that Sony was waiting for low power-consumption semiconductors and better screen technology before challenging the Game Boy hegemony. Indeed the Japanese Nikkei BP news service recently claimed a GBA-era Sony device, known as Project ET, was cancelled by Kutaragi in 2000. For the fact remains, initially designed in the mid-1990s, GBA's raw performance is now less than a tenth of the most powerful mobile phones.

Sony calls the shots

As announced at E3, the PSP has two foundations. The first is the underlying technology, described as being 'super chipsets utilising the latest 90nm semiconductor technology'. One candidate for this role is the new integrated PlayStation2 Emotion Engine and Graphics Synthesizer chip. Known either as Dragon or EE+GS@90nm, initial production has recently started on a new 90nm fabrication plant run jointly by Sony and Toshiba. It isn't clear however, whether this chipset has been re-engineered to downgrade its performance and improve its power consumption. There is no point having a handheld device with full PS2 performance running games on a 4.5-inch screen for example.

More light was shed on PSP's performance by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe president **Chris Deering** during his keynote at the inaugural ELPSA Games Summit. "PSP's specifications are quite a bit further ahead of PSone," he revealed. "It's probably better to say it's like PlayStation2 minus a bit."

Quite what this means in practise remains to be seen. Sony says it will start shipping PC-based development kits for PSP in the autumn, so presumably more information will be released then. At present, Deering says that the hardware specification remains fluid. "Things are at a very delicate stage at present," he said. "It's like making a final cut of a movie. Things are being adjusted almost on a daily basis."

The other key feature of the PSP demonstrates Sony's ambition to position it as *the* handheld entertainment system; something Ken Kutaragi calls 'the Walkman of the 21st century'. Sony's new Universal Media Disc (UMD) provides both the movie and music industries with a new platform for their content. UMD is a 60mm optical disc, which, like Sony's mini-disc format, is contained in a plastic case. With a capacity of 1.8 GB, it's been developed in-house to be cheap and quick to manufacture, while containing strong digital rights management features. This is crucial as the high-cost and long turnaround production times of GBA's cartridges have squeezed publishers' margins to the extent that few are committed to the machine.

According to Deering, the UMD will have the capacity for about an hour of video footage at the highest quality MPEG4 data rate of 4Mbit/sec, and over two hours at 2Mbit/sec. Playback will be via PSP's hardware MPEG4 decoder. "On the PSP's five inch screen, it will be every bit as good as DVD-quality on a TV, maybe even better," he said. In terms of audio storage, UMD will have the capacity for over 30 hours of MP3-quality music.

Enter the phone

But while PSP is certainly primed to revolutionise the technology of portable gaming, the launch of Nokia's N-Gage gaming deck on October 7 is perhaps the more symbolic event. For despite the generalyl lukewarm attitude of traditional game publishers and developers towards the initial incarnation of N-Gage, it marks the arrival of mobile handset manufacturers

"Sony's new Universal Media Disc, or UMD, provides both the movie and music industries with a new platform for their content"

Unlocking the potential

A big problem with handheld 3D graphics is the lack of the standards like DirectX or OpenGL that define mainstream PC graphics. With this in mind, the Khronos Group, an independent consortium made up of chip manufacturers, tools companies and developers, is creating OpenGL ES (OpenGL for Embedded Systems), a low-level API for advanced embedded graphics using a subset of OpenGL's features. The first implementation of the standard saw Texas Instruments collaborating with operating system developer Symbian to improve the 3D performance of its OMAP processors.

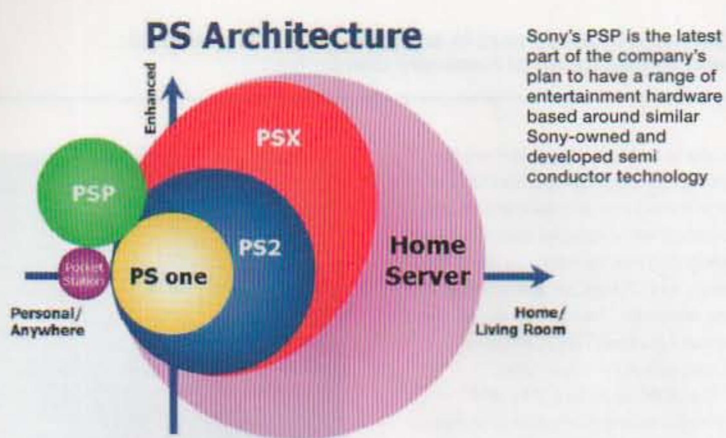
Middleware companies such as Criterion, NDL and Vicarious Visions are also beginning to reposition their PC and console technologies for the handheld market. Criterion, in particular, has recently announced a partnership with modelling tools specialist Discreet to increase support for handheld developers. "Discreet and Criterion have been working to deliver great workflow solutions for console development," says **Paul Lypaczewski**, Discreet's general manager. "We are excited to expand our relationship to evolve the future game development pipeline and deliver high-quality content within the mobile sector."



Although designed as a high end phone mydevice has more than enough power to offer interesting gaming features

PSP
screen size
480 x 272 pixels

[illegible]
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[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
Connections: USB2.0, Memory Stick slot
Battery: rechargeable Lithium ion



Sony's PSP is the latest part of the company's plan to have a range of entertainment hardware based around similar Sony-owned and developed semi conductor technology





Finnish company Fathammer's X-Forge engine is one of the first handheld 3D middleware game engine. It's being used by MonkeyStone Games for their N-Gage version of *Red Faction*, as well as being the development toolkit for Tapwave's Helix device

as an industrial block into the entertainment market, if not the gaming space proper.

One way in which this is crucial is the contrast between the skillset of mobile handset manufacturers and console manufacturers. For example, mobile phone design is driven by a continuous update schedule, in which new models are released every six months or so. Key to this is the adoption of open standards, ensuring applications and services from different vendors work across all hardware units. Competition for sales is played out on the basis of form factors like appearance, user interface and branding.

And it's not only high-profile companies such as Nokia who see this emerging high-powered handheld space as a lucrative opportunity. A number of smaller technology companies are entering too. Using their expertise in the smartphone space, UK-technology vendor TTPCom and Finnish interface specialist MyOrigo are also launching high-end mobile phones, each with strong gaming elements.

"When we started b'ngo in 2002, analysts were claiming mobile gaming would be huge but the phones were clearly not designed for game playing," explains TTPCom's **Nicolas Sauvage**, who is b'ngo's project leader. "Our objective was no compromises in terms of gameplay and communications facilities, whilst keeping the cost of the device as low as possible."

Meanwhile, another little-known company chancing its arm is US-vendor Tapwave. Formed by ex-employees of PDA manufacturer Palm, Tapwave's Helix portable gaming device is technically comparable to Sony's PSP. It is due to be launched in the US at the end of 2003. "Phones such as Nokia's 7650 are already capable of near PSone-quality games. I think we're at an evolutionary stage in the

How the contenders shape up

1

Nokia N-Gage

Processor: 104MHz ARM
Wireless connectivity: Tri-band GSM, Bluetooth
Display: colour 176 x 208 pixels, 4096 colours (12bit)
Entertainment: Digital music player and recorder, stereo FM radio, XHTML browser, email support
Operating system: Symbian
Sound: MP3, AAC, MIDI, WAV
Media: MMC
Connections: USB
Battery: rechargeable Lithium ion

2

Sony PSP

Processor: TBA (possibly 294.912MHz Dragon)
Wireless connectivity: none
Display: backlit colour 480 x 272 pixel
Entertainment: MPEG4 for movies playback, possible inclusion of FM radio
Operating system: TBA
Sound: stereo PCM, MP3
Media: 60mm optical red laser Universal Media Disc (1.8 GB)
Connections: USB 2.0, Memory Stick slot
Battery: rechargeable Lithium ion

3

Tapwave Helix

Processor: 200MHz ARM 920T with ATI Imageon 100 graphic accelerator
Wireless connectivity: Bluetooth
Display: backlit colour 480 x 320 pixel, touch-sensitive
Entertainment: MPEG4 playback
Operating system: Palm
Sound: Stereo MP3, 16-channel MIDI
Media: Dual SD card slots
Connections: 2 x USB, infra-red, SDIO support for FM Radio, 802.11, digital cameras or GPS
Battery: rechargeable Lithium (x2)

4

TTPCom b'ngo

Processor: 39MHz ARM 7 TDMI
Wireless connectivity: GSM, GPRS, Bluetooth
Display: backlit colour 200 x 176 pixel, 65,536 colours (16bit)
Entertainment: VGA camera, Wireless Graphics Engine
Operating system: Symbian
Sound: polyphonic MIDI
Media: SD card slot
Connections: TBA
Battery: rechargeable Lithium

5

MyOrigo mydevice

Processor: ARM-based
Wireless connectivity: wireless tri-band GSM, GPRS
Display: colour 176 x 320 pixel, touch-sensitive
Entertainment: VGA camera, Web browsing, email
Operating system: Tao Intent
Sound: MP3 player
Media: SD/MMC card slot
Connections: USB, SyncML
Battery: rechargable Lithium



TTPCom's b'ngo adds gaming features including an 8-way joypad and shoulder buttons to the features of a mobile phone. It should be released in the UK by the end of the year



Sony's PSP is an example of a tipping point created by the incremental improvement in a number of specialist areas such as screen, battery and processor technology

mobile gaming space which equals the time when PlayStation first came out," reckons **Samuli Syvahuoko**, founder of Finnish-middleware company Fathammer. Its X-Forge engine is being licensed by Tapware to provide the game development tools solution for Helix, as well as being used for two launch N-Gage titles; THQ's *Red Faction* and *MotoGP*.

Power behind the throne

A key enabler of this frantic activity is UK-based chip specialist ARM. It provides the processor design for devices such as Nintendo's Game Boy Advance handhelds, as well as the majority of smartphones. ARM cores are also being used in N-Gage, Helix, TTPcom's b'ngo and MyOrigo's mydevice. The company refuses to comment on possible involvement with PSP, although Sony has traditionally used processors from ARM rival MIPS.

"Convergence between PDAs, phone and game platforms was always going to happen," explains ARM's consumer entertainment segment manager, **Noel Hurley**. "The hard part is defining whether the new devices are games machines with wider functionality such as playing music or taking calls, or mobile phones that can play games. From a technology standpoint however, these devices are very similar, so the answer lies in how they are marketed."

One of the key areas Hurley reckons will ensure interest in this new market is 3D content. "I think the consumer base is very interested in playing games while the big mobile phone people are hot for 3D too," he says. "They see games as a potentially big driver for 3G."

ARM splits its 3D handheld technology into two parts. The top-end features specific 3D hardware which is integrated on the CPU core. Licensed from PowerVR, the UK-company behind Dreamcast's 3D chipset, it uses a tile-based rendering system. Called MBX, this breaks down a 3D scene into smaller tiles to reduce the processing overhead. The other approach uses a special file format from UK company Superscape. Called Swerve 3D, it effectively allows developers to compress their 3D models to ensure games are as small as possible for download over a mobile phone network. Although very different in application, they both share an important design goal.

"Bandwidth is the big issue when you are trying to run 3D graphics in the handheld space," says Hurley. "If you can keep it to a minimum, you can save a lot of power." This concern also seems to play a crucial part in Sony's PSP design. One of the most intriguing parts of the PSP press release is the announcement that it will utilise NURBS technology. A mainstay of the movie special effect industry, NURBS, (or Non-Uniform Rational B-Splines to give them their full title) are a way of creating very high definition scenes using minimum amounts of bandwidth. Few game developers have experience of using NURBS or other forms of what are generally known as higher order surfaces however.

"What will Nintendo's reaction be to this invasion of its territory? The company has been resolute but the rumour mill has already started"



One of the technologies used in PowerVR's MBX 3D chip to improve graphical quality is Cryteks's Polybump. It uses a sub-divisional surface-derived technique to create detailed 3D models using small amounts of bandwidth. The PSP is thought to use a similar method

"Until we get a bit more information it's hard to see how it's going to work out," reckons **Mike Merren**, managing director of Climax's Handheld Games division. "NURBS are useful for artists on console and PC games because it makes their models scalable in terms of number of polygons, but it seems to be a weird thing to throw into a portable device."

He does conceed however it may make working on PSP games easier in terms of allowing developers to create titles across the PlayStation family of consoles. "One key advantage will be the ability to share content with PlayStation2 titles and in time PlayStation3, too," he says. "With GBA, it is such as 2D-focused machine, we had to completely start from scratch."

This point was underlined by Chris Deering who claims elements of PSone code will be portable to PSP but developers won't be able to recompile complete games and expect them to run. "Programming PSP should be more like PSone than PlayStation2 in its simplicity," he says.

But aside from the exact workings of PSP, perhaps the biggest question to be answered is what will Nintendo's reaction be to this invasion of its territory. While the company has been resolute that it can fight off the challenge of PSP, as well as emerging pressure of the mobile phone manufacturers, the rumour mill has already started. One school of thought expects the introduction of a SNES-style FX chip as a way of providing better 3D performance for GBA games in an attempt at maintaining Nintendo's position within the handheld market. This would see a small co-processor integrated directly into GBA game cartridges. If true, it would obviously be a stopgap solution as it would put additional pressure on GBA's already marginal software pricing structure. Somewhere in Kyoto it seems likely therefore that designers are working on the blueprints for a proper 3D-focused son of GBA. And that's to say nothing of the continuing Xboy murmurings…

Robbie Bach reveals multimedia future for Xbox

Chief Xbox officer reveals that no, Microsoft's newly announced multimedia approach isn't a change of heart, and that yes, it will eventually make a profit

First it was all about underpromising and overdelivering; about giving developers enough dough to play with. Then it was all about the games. Now it's still all about the games. But with a little bit of multimedia thrown in. And going forward? **Edge** caught up with chief Xbox officer, **Robbie Bach**, at E3 to discover what the future holds for Microsoft's console.

What are your thoughts about the show? How would you compare Microsoft's offering to those of your competitors?
Certainly this is the best E3 we've ever had. We've been here a long time on the PC side of the business and now on Xbox, and this is clearly our best show ever, across the board. Relative to the competition, I haven't been able to go and see the other booths yet, but the buzz I hear from people is that *GT4* looks good, so *Project Gotham Racing 2* against *GT4* should be fun. And Nintendo's booth... I haven't heard a lot of exciting things going on there. People's reviews from the briefings that took place early in the week is that ours was very good; that Sony did a pretty good job as well; Nintendo's briefing was a little slower for people. That's sort of the general sense of the show.

"In 20 months we've gone from never having done anything in the console space to being number two in every world market except one"

What about Microsoft's move into the multimedia space? Does that reflect a change of heart?
Well that reflects two things. One, it reflects our success. Part of the reason we were so hardcore at the very beginning about it being not just games but serious games for serious gamers was that we had to establish our credibility as somebody who could be successful in the business and successful as a videogame player. And that meant that anything we did that was distracting made people think we didn't understand it, so we focused very squarely. Now we think that we have the credibility where we are in the market to do some experiments, to do some things that are in related areas. And consumer tastes are evolving too, and we're seeing more people who want to do digital entertainment activities that aren't just about games. How do I attract women to Xbox? *Music Mixer's* a great example of a product that I think a lot of women would like to play.

What about making conventional games that aren't aimed at such a narrow demographic?
There's certainly that, but there's a lot more than that when you go through the booth, particularly on the thirdparty side. So while we still have the hardcore content, we are now totally excited about bringing things that will appeal to a broader audience. I think you'll see that in our portfolio, and there's two or three titles that fall into that broad audience category that we haven't talked about at the show that will ship this holiday.

What about extensions to the music-making stuff; are you going to branch out into other multimedia directions?
I think certainly there's an opportunity there. *Music Mixer* for us is a chance to see how that works. I'm not going to call it an experiment, but it's a new idea. It's an innovative thing and we have to see whether the innovation is going to sell. If it is successful then there's a lot of other things that we can do.

What about handhelds? Do you feel any pressure from Sony's PSP and the extension of the PlayStation brand into the portable sector?
Well Microsoft's in the handheld sector; we have Pocket PC, we have Smartphone, we have a product called Media2Go, so you can decide which one of those the PSP competes with – because I'm not sure exactly what that will be. But the handheld gaming market is a very different market.

But is Sony's move into the handheld sector consolidating its brand?
No I don't think so. In a way I can argue the reverse; it's yet another business they have to build that can distract them from doing the things they have to do to be successful in the console space. Certainly Nintendo has done well with Game Boy but it hasn't done well with GameCube, and Game Boy hasn't helped GameCube at all. And I don't believe that this Game Boy Player is going to work. I don't think there's any synergy there at all. The two businesses are very different animals, and for us to get into that business would mean starting up another thing on the scale of Xbox, and believe me that Xbox is plenty of work.

Are you concerned about EA's continuing refusal to support Xbox Live?
EA has been a great partner for us. It's actually published more titles than Microsoft has on Xbox. So the partnership there is quite strong – this is just an issue about how Live works for us and for EA. We think we can present a business model that will work for EA and we continue to talk to it about. It's difficult because it's all new.

We often get asked if the Xbox is our 'hub' or the centre for the home experience. And the answer is that it's not. We think the physical centre of the home experience is going to be a media centre PC, with a big hard disk, a lot of memory, that's able to manage a wireless network. So what Xbox becomes is a very smart client – a spoke on the wheel if you will – that's the entertainment centre for what you're doing in the home. Xbox Live uses a whole bunch of MSN technology – we use the MSN billing service, we use MSN Passport, we use the MSN alerts technology. This is the kind of stuff that you're going to see growing, and you're going to see the connection points between what Xbox does and what the rest of the company does come to light. That said, Xbox has to be the world's best console, and we won't ever lose sight of that

When is Xbox going to be profitable?
That depends on how much of market share we want, and how big an installed base we want. I can make Xbox profitable relatively quickly; I can stop lowering the price of the console and accept the fact that I'll sell less but then I won't have the installed base growth. Our model right now is an investment model, focused on investing in the marketplace, and building an installed base of customers both for Xbox and Xbox Live. Longer-term, that investment is going to have a very good return. In the space of 19 or 20 months we've gone from never having done anything in the console space to being the number two console provider in every market in the world except one. That's a huge step but it's going to take a long time to turn that into profit. But it will happen. The good news is that Microsoft has a very long window when we think about investments, and this is an important strategic investment for the company.

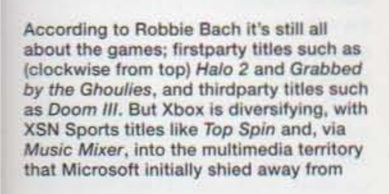












According to Robbie Bach it's still all about the games; firstparty titles such as (clockwise from top) *Halo 2* and *Grabbed by the Ghoulies*, and thirdparty titles such as *Doom III*. But Xbox is diversifying, with XSN Sports titles like *Top Spin* and, via *Music Mixer*, into the multimedia territory that Microsoft initially shied away from

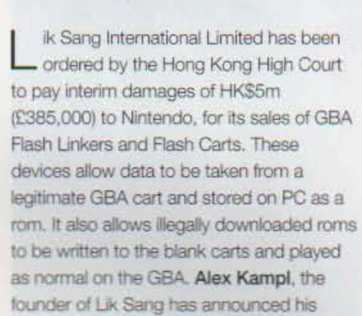






Nintendo wins Lik Sang Piracy Case

Despite having no Intellectual Property law specialist, the Hong Kong High Court finds against the popular import software and peripheral supplier



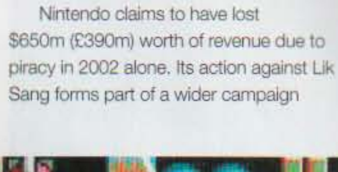
Lik Sang International Limited has been ordered by the Hong Kong High Court to pay interim damages of HK$5m (£385,000) to Nintendo, for its sales of GBA Flash Linkers and Flash Carts. These devices allow data to be taken from a legitimate GBA cart and stored on PC as a rom. It also allows illegally downloaded roms to be written to the blank carts and played as normal on the GBA. **Alex Kampl**, the founder of Lik Sang has announced his intention to appeal.

Lik Sang.com, the online retailer, has been separately owned since late 2002 when the Nintendo case and similar injunctions from Microsoft and Sony concerning the sale of mod-chips were brought against Lik Sang International. The Website and its sales remain entirely unaffected by the verdict.

Nintendo claims to have lost $650m (£390m) worth of revenue due to piracy in 2002 alone. Its action against Lik Sang forms part of a wider campaign cracking down on unauthorised sales, including recent cease and desist orders issued to independent retailers in the UK who sell imported Nintendo games and products.

While Lik Sang.com has stopped selling Flash Linkers, they are still widely vailable online. Newer models are faster and bigger, with USB and Smart Media Card compatibility

Despite the judge's admission that he found copyright law "very confusing", he found against Lik Sang on the grounds that he had "no doubt that they delivered the means whereby a person would be able to steal the games of the plaintiffs". His judgement was founded on a distinction analogous to that made between drug users and drug traffickers: Hong Kong law being directed not at the person who made an illegal copy but at the persons who furnished the means to make the illegal copying occur. It is a distinction which seems particularly inappropriate in this case, since the Flash Carts sold by Lik Sang are not used by pirate distributors.

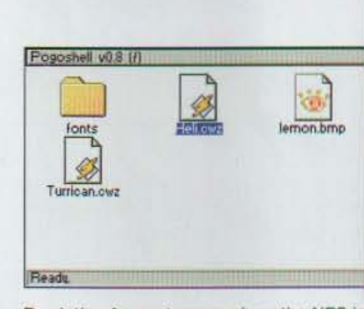




Games like *Oil's Well* by Yiri T. Khol and *Deflektor* by Foxy (above) are legally downloadable. However, many are very closely inspired by older, copyright protected titles

Muddy waters

The question is further muddied by the fact that there are many legitimate uses for the Linker, which have no bearing on copyright issues. Owners can upload music, text and image files onto a Flash Cart, and then use their GBA as a portable display device. Calculators, drawing applications and a GBA operating system (PogoShell) are also available. There is also a wide range of legitimate, homebrew game software which can be played through a Flash Cart. Sites such as www.gbadev.org offer guides to do-it-yourself GBA development, as well as downloads for demos, clones and original games. Flash Linker usage is also common amongst professional developers, to enable them to test code throughout the development process. Indeed, Alex Kampl points out that the developer of the game used by Nintendo in court to demonstrate the workings of the Flash Linker, had in fact purchased hundreds of the devices from Lik Sang itself.



Emulation for systems such as the NES is now possible on the GBA – producing a legal minefield within a legal minefield

The shift of focus from illegally pirated software to equipment which, among other uses, enables piracy sets an alarming precedent. As Alex Kampl says, "Nintendo doesn't need to prove you are a pirate any more, it is assumed you are if you have the technical means to copy."

Sony pushes PlayStation2 online in the UK

An uncharacteristic Sony enters online market with more of a whimper than a bang





***Twisted Metal Black Online* (above) fared rather less well than *SOCOM* (top), which entered the sales charts at number two**

Sony launched its broadband network gaming service on June 11, though you'd have been hard pressed to notice, since the company apparently did little to publicise the fact. After successful public beta trials, the service launched with two key launch titles: *SOCOM: US Navy SEALs* (bundled with headset peripheral for £50) and *Twisted Metal Black Online* (available on its own for £25 or for £40 bundled with Sony's Network Adaptor kit). And although there is as yet no annual charge for the service, as there is with Xbox Live, connection requires a Network Adaptor kit, containing a PlayStation 2 Network Adaptor and Network Access Disc (available unbundled at £25).

Unlike the US, where the service is available over narrowband and broadband connections, the UK offering is restricted to high-speed connections, and Sony has strong broadband partnerships in place with Telewest Broadband, BT Openworld, BT Retail, NTL and Freeserve. Sony will no doubt be hoping to match its performance in the US, where more than 500,000 adapters were sold in just six months. Although such figures aren't available as this issue of **Edge** goes to press, *SOCOM* entered ChartTrack's weekly all format full price chart at number two which is good, encouraging news for the company.

If rumours regarding PlayStation3 are true, network connected services will be of significant strategic importance to the company in the next few years. Nevertheless, this appeared to be a muted launch compared to Microsoft's well-publicised introduction of Xbox Live, with Sony seemingly doing little to woo the sort of hardcore gaming, early adopting community that would appear to be the natural constituency for the service. Indeed public beta trials (which commenced on March 31) seemed less prominent than those for Xbox Live.

A Sony spokesperson was unavailable for comment.



BAFTA awards

Gaming gets an award ceremony to call its own, as BAFTA restructures its Interactive Awards

BAFTA has announced an overhaul of its Interactive Awards. From this year, two separate ceremonies will be held: The BAFTA Interactive Awards and the BAFTA Games Awards. The former remains focused on Website, interactive television, DVD and educational software design, and the latter will be devoted entirely to gaming.

On the reasoning behind the split, **Sue Thexton**, the Chair of the BAFTA Interactive Committee said, '"We have taken the decision to separate the awards after extensive consultation with sections of the industry. This change should enable BAFTA to give all areas of new media greater support."

The division of the ceremonies allows for the creation of a whole new range of gaming categories. These will include the following genre game awards: Strategy, Racing, Adventure, Action and Sports Game. The traditional platform specific prizes remain, but will now be complemented with an overall Best Game award. A new award, for Best Animation or Intro will also be introduced.

The split also means that nominees in broader categories will no longer be competing against widely differing media – last year saw *Pikmin* pitched against 'Big Brother 3' in the Interactivity category. While some will feel that narrowing the field of competition strips the awards of some of their weight, others will argue that comparing like with like will lead to a more meaningful contest.

Started in 1998, the first gaming BAFTA Interactive award was won by Rare's *GoldenEye*. Last year *Halo* dominated, winning both the Multiplayer and Xbox awards. The awards have helped raise the status of gaming within the UK, with celebrity hosts such as Stephen Fry, Adam and Joe and Phill Jupitus. Over the years they have recognised such diverse achievements as the music of *Shogun: Total War*, the sound in *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, and the career of Ian Livingstone.

Developers and publishers can enter their work online at www.bafta.org from now until the October 1. Nominations will be announced on the November 24, and the ceremonies will take place in February 2004.

bafta
interactive
awards



Edge isn't reading too much into the difference in tone of the two logos

CUTTINGS



Vodafone hosts games contest

In what is no doubt a bid to attract subscribers to its 3G services, mobile phone operator Vodafone is launching a UK-wide mobile gaming championship this summer. In a bid to find the UK's best *mobile* gamer, the Vodafone live! Arcade will be conducting regional heats in ten cities, including Cardiff, Glasgow and Manchester. The finals (which will be 'star-studded' apparently) will be held in London this October, and will be hosted by Aleks Krotoski, ex-presenter of 'Bits' and 'Thumb Bandits'. For further information on the event visit www.vodafone.co.uk/livearcade

Game Republic founded

Several Yorkshire-based independent developers are banding together to form a consortium called Game Republic in a bid to increase their ability to court the investment community and deal with publishers.
The move has largely been orchestrated by a steering group which includes Elliot Gay of The Code Monkeys, Team 17's Martyn Brown, and Charles Cecil, head of Revolution Software and one of the nicest men in the videogame industry. The organisation has also benefited from the support of regional development agency Yorkshire Forward, TIGA. Other developers to have joined the collective include IDIGICON, Gamesauce, Yeti Studios and Outsource Media, and the organisers are hoping to go on to sign up all 40 developers in Yorkshire and Humber.

Sony rumours

Following last issue's news report about Sony's new set-top box device, the PSX, the company has turned remarkably reticent about the new 'console'. Still, it has reached **Edge**'s ears that, in addition to producing the PSX, Sony's consumer electronics division will also be taking responsibility for producing the forthcoming PSP handheld, and perhaps even the PlayStation3. It's another example of internal politics spilling over into the public domain – also highlighted recently by a story that Sony's electronics arm was preparing a handheld gaming device some years ago before it was cancelled at the behest of the gaming division. In any case, such a move is certainly in keeping with the company's recent declaration that it intended to invigorate its consumer electronics arm with technology from its hugely successful gaming division.

Games are over for UK developers

The complexity of developing original titles combined with anxiety among publishers is creating problems for several UK studios

The post-E3 glow has faded quickly for a number of UK developers as the videogame publishing market continues its ongoing shakeout.

Perhaps the highest profile casualty has been Argonaut's long-awaited *Malice*, which has been dropped by publisher Vivendi Universal Games.

According to Argonaut's chief operating officer, **Joss Ellis**, the decision resulted from reorganisation on the part of the publisher. "The game was originally signed to the Sierra label but when this became part of the main VU brand based in LA, they realised *Malice* was going to clash with other similar titles such as *Spyro* and *Crash*," he said.

Malice's publishing rights have now reverted to Argonaut, although Vivendi is helping it to find another publisher for the game, which is said to be almost finished.

But another Argonaut game, the girl-friendly action-adventure *Orchid*, has been canned. "We took the mutual decision with publisher Namco to abandon development as it would have taken a fortune to finish," Ellis revealed, demonstrating the high risk now involved when creating original game titles. Argonaut still has ongoing projects at each publisher, however; Vivendi will release *SWAT: GST*, while Namco is committed to *I-Ninja*, one of the surprises of E3.

Meanwhile, other UK developers have been caught in the fallout from the bankruptcy of US publisher 3DO. Blitz Games was close to finishing a game based on the kids animated TV series 'Cubix', while Eutechnyx had signed its *Street Racing Syndicate* to the publisher. It's believed all 3DO's assets are being held by the company's receiver, prior to being sold off to the highest bidders.

Edge has also learned of a number of other developers with innovative games which have either failed or are finding it hard to get publisher support.

"Unfortunately publishers just don't seem to be interested in anything that doesn't come with a big licence attached," said the head of one UK development studio, who preferred to remain anonymous.

"Sadly, the performance of *Enter The Matrix* seems to prove them right. It's a great licence, but a dreadful game, and it's selling millions."

Edge takes an in-depth look at the history of cancelled games in a feature this month (see p70).







Argonaut's high-profile *Malice* (above left) is without a home but the company still expects to place it with a new publisher soon. Sadly, *Orchid* (above right) is now canned full stop. The collapse of 3DO, meanwhile, leaves the fate of *Street Racing Syndicate* (top) in doubt

Game theory goes back to college

Bristol's Watershed hosts another summit to allow academics to discuss the nature of play

Photography: Mark Berry



Edge readers with an academic interest in videogames should get along to The Watershed Arts Centre in Bristol on July 14 to see the start of Power-Up, the latest academic summit

Following the success of the Games Culture conference in 2001, the event organisers have decided to organise a follow up academic event entitled Power-Up: Computer Games, Ideology and Play. The symposium takes place on July 14-15 at The Watershed Arts Centre in Bristol, and is being organised by The Play Research Group within the School of Cultural Studies at the University of the West of England in Bristol. This year's event is intended to be smaller and more focused than Games Culture 2001, in order to maximise the scope and impact of discussion and debate.

The event is borne of a desire to foster new theoretical frameworks and approaches with which to study videogames. The organisers hope to shed light on 'emerging relationships of consumption, play, new media technologies and structures of social and economic power'.

Over the course of two days the conference programme includes talks such as 'We Are Having Fun, Aren't We?' by Barry Atkins; 'Playing Geopolitics: Ideology In Interaction in *Command & Conquer: Generals* and *Black Hawk Down*', by Geoff King; 'Feminism 'In' and 'At' Play: Female *Quake* Clans and the Politics of Subversion', by Helen Kennedy; and 'Locating and Studying Girl Gamers', by Gareth Schott and Siobhan Thomas.

The conference will obviously be of chief interest to an academic audience, particularly those concerned with the significance of play in popular culture and media in general, though anybody with an interest in videogames is likely to find it informative and entertaining.

The price of the event is £75 for a two-day pass including dinner; £50 for a two-day pass excluding dinner; and £25 for a single day. Concessions are available. Visit www.power-up.org.uk for more information, or contact Helen Kennedy (helen.kennedy@uwe.ac.uk).

PlayStation Experience scales up for 2003

ECTS, GDCE and Sony's consumer event set to join forces this August

As part of a minor rebranding exercise intended to increase interest in ECTS and associated videogame events, this year sees the launch of London Games Week.

Over the course of the last week in August, the event will incorporate this year's ECTS and GDCE, as well as the second annual PlayStation Experience, and various other consumer events that have yet to be announced. ECTS will take place from August 27-29, GDCE from August 26-29, and the PlayStation Experience will take place at Earl's Court from August 28-31. Tickets for the latter will be on sale at £6 in advance (0870 444 5208) or £8 on the door.

Some of the publishers that have already signed up for Games Week include Atari, Codemasters, Eidos, Konami, Microsoft, and Ubi Soft, and Sony is promising a greater thirdparty presence at this year's consumer showcase of the PlayStation brand. "The PlayStation Experience was a resounding success in 2002," pointed out Sony's **Ray Maguire**. "In excess of 20,000 people attended the event over the three days, and we have had a huge amount of interest from consumers who want to see this event become a regular occurrence." Consequently, this year's event will offer live entertainment, including music, skating and BMX events, plus celebrity appearances. Also, the event will be double the size of last year's.

"London Games Week brings together every sector of the industry and enables games to punch above their weight within the mainstream media," argued **Andy Lane**, Games Week's director. "Games deserve more real-world coverage, and Europe deserves greater recognition of its pivotal role in creating some of the very best games around – with all of the events going on during the week, London Games Week will help to make these messages heard loud and clear."



Photography: Martin Thompson

Owing to the success of last year's event, the Sony PlayStation Experience returns this year as part of London Games Week, which also incorporates both ECTS and GDCE

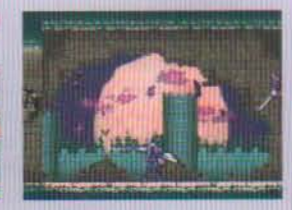
Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
IndyCar Series	PS2/Xbox/PC	Codemasters	Brain in a Jar	8
Planetside	PC	Ubi Soft	Sony Online Entertainment	8
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	GBA	Konami	In-house	7
Lufia: The Ruins of Lore	GBA	Atlas USA	Taito	7
Rise of Nations	PC	Microsoft	Big Huge Games	7
MotoGP3	PS2	Namco	In-house	6
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War	Xbox	Activision	Nerve Software	6
Speed Kings	Xbox/PS2/GC	Acclaim	Climax London	6
Brute Force	Xbox	Microsoft	Digital Anvil	5
Midnight Club II	PS2/Xbox/PC	Rockstar Games	In-house	5
SOCOM: US Navy Seals	PS2	SCEE	Zipper Interactive	5
Wakeboarding Unleashed Featuring Shaun Murray	PS2/Xbox	Activision	Shaba Games	5
Lost Kingdoms II	GameCube	Activision	From Software	4
Enter the Matrix	PS2/Xbox/GC/PC	Atari	In-house	3
Crazy Taxi: Catch a Ride	GBA	THQ	Graphic State	2



IndyCar Series



Planetside



Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow

Rise of Nations

CUTTINGS



Capcom signs GTA for Japanese release

Capcom and Rockstar have signed a deal that will see the Japanese publisher localising *Grand Theft Auto III* for the Japanese market. Capcom will also publish the PlayStation2 and PC versions of the title in the country, in spite of the game's lukewarm reception by one or two high-profile Japanese developers. "We at Rockstar Games have great respect for Japan's passionate gaming community and admire its celebrated video game history," said Rockstar president **Sam Houser**. "We have always felt that the freedom, nonlinearity, and gameplay mechanics explored in the *Grand Theft Auto* series possessed a universal allure that would appeal to gamers worldwide, and clearly Capcom shares the same beliefs."

PomPom gets publisher

PomPom Games, the winner of the **Edge** Award for Excellence at ECTS 2001, has signed an agreement with US-based GarageGames that will see the developer's two titles, *Space Tripper* (**E**97) and *Mutant Storm* (**E**118), published online. "PomPom Games is very happy to be working with GarageGames," offers **Michael P Michael**, PomPom Games' co-founder. "There is some real excitement building within the independent gaming community, and we found GarageGames at the very hub of this movement."

For more information visit www.pompom.org.uk

GBA SP reaches a million

According to Nintendo, sales of its GBA SP have reached 1.1 million units after only ten weeks on sale in North America, indicating a sales rate of more than ten units sold per minute since the device's launch. To celebrate, the company has announced new Onyx and Flame models. With retailers reporting an older audience for the GBA SP, the figures are bad news for those companies aiming to contest Nintendo's domination of the handheld sector.

www.genemation.com

A head of the pack

Not just another facial representation tool, Genemation's face synthesis package GenHead demonstrates that while beauty is skin-deep, it pays to rely on brains






Although the 2D faces looks as if they are from real people, in fact they are completely invented having been generated from a database population of several hundred initial models

Give us a smile

As well as static faces, GenHead also has controls for generating expressions and phoneme pronunciation targets. Simple slider menus allow users to create default expressions such as smiles, frowns, fear and surprise, which can then be outputted as 3D heads. The team is working on developing libraries of different ethnic types as well because the current database is mainly caucasian. This would enable developers of games such as *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* to create bespoke audiences for localised releases.

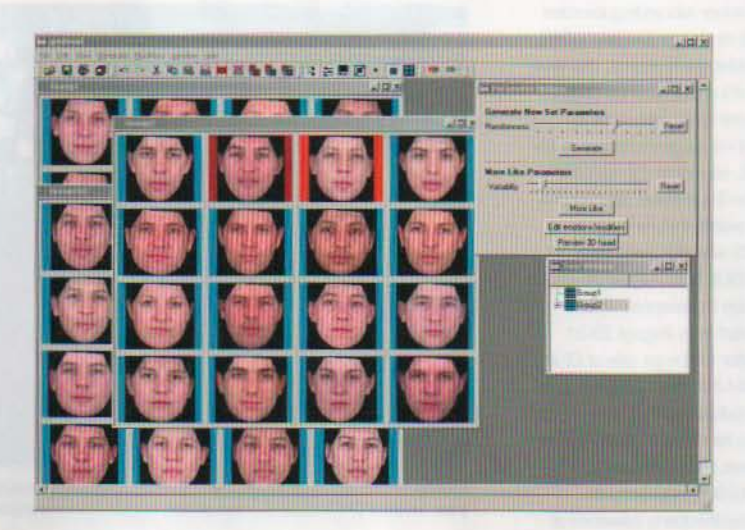
Implementation not inspiration is the key to success, so say the gurus of the business world. It certainly seems to be true thus far for Genemation, a small startup out of Victoria University of Manchester's department of Image Science and BioMedical Engineering.

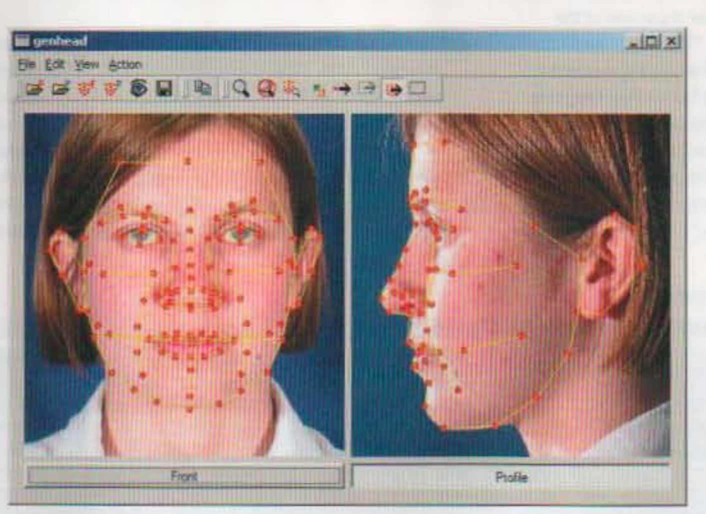
"Genemation came out of research into facial recognition for security applications. Some bright spark had the idea of reversing the process," says CEO **John Bickley**, who represents the game business side of the company, having previously been Psygnosis' vice president of publishing. The result of that simple twist of research is GenHead, a software package that allows developers to create photorealistic virtual 2D and 3D heads at the touch of a button. "Our core technology is about building statistical models that understand the shape and texture of facial features. Combined with our initial database of real faces, we can create new faces from thin air," Bickley continues.

Facing overheads

The rocket science behind GenHead is encapsulated in the way it analyses the human face. "We use a genetic algorithm which treats the parameters underlying the structure of faces as if they were DNA," explains **Dr Louise Butcher**, one of the creators of the underlying technology. This means users can generate completely random sets of new aces using slider controls for attributes such as gender and 'averageness'. It's also possible to select a number of specific faces and literally create a new family of faces from them. The faces can be converted into 3D heads via standard art packages such as 3ds max or Maya using either meshes supplied by Genemation or a custom mesh.

It's certainly an interesting twist within the market of digital facial representation. Up to this point, most companies in the field such as Digimask and 3DMeNow have focused on generating specific 3D heads based on photos of real people. GenHead can do that too of course, but Bickley sees the initial selling point being the huge productivity boost random head generation can provide.





Like other facial representation packages such as Digimask and 3DMeNow, individual faces can be inputted into the mix using GenHead's markup feature

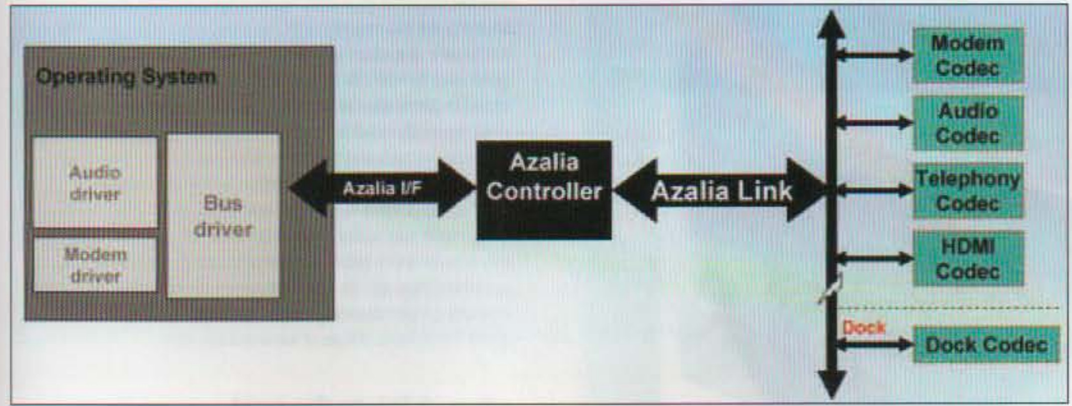
One key area is populating largescale environments such as crowds in sports games or NPCs in massively multiplayer games. And because GenHead's faces aren't real people, there are no copyright issues. "I was talking to one US studio head, who has six artists employed full-time creating animated heads for its sport games. That's a lot of overhead I think GenHead could significantly reduce," Bickley says.

Another ability enabled by GenHead is the ability to age faces. "We've received some interesting feedback from developers in this area because it creates new dynamics for them particularly with respect to sport management-style games where you might want to age players over the seasons," he points out. It's a neat feature that should help developers make their games more realistic at minimum overhead. Next up a hair modeller powerful enough to keep up with Beckham's barnet.

www.intel.com

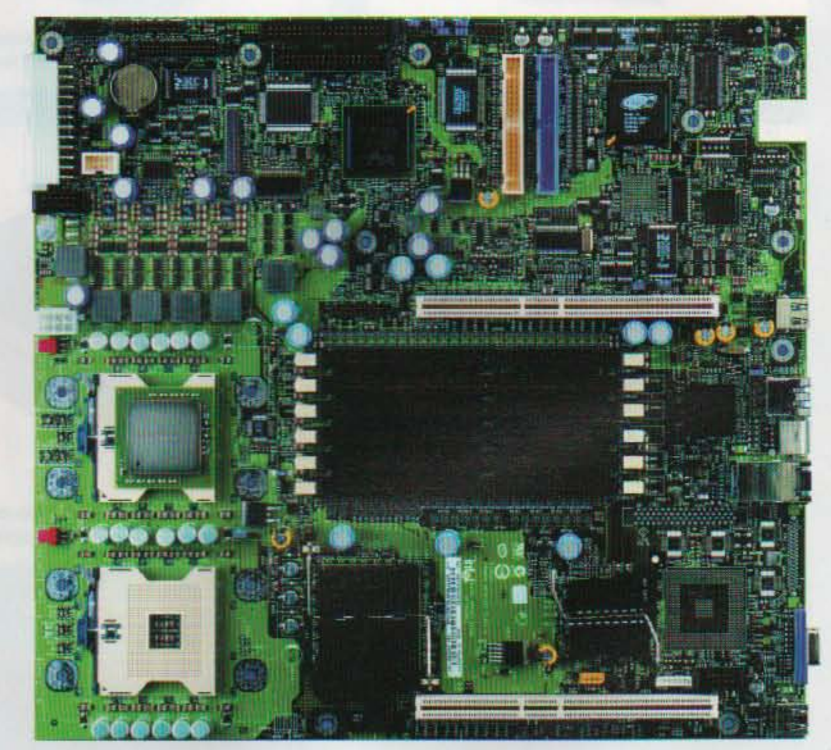
Future sounds bright

Codenamed Azalia, an Intel-led group of sound specialists, software vendors and OEMs is working to define the next generation of PC audio



It's not all that pretty but this diagram demonstrates Azalia's key features. Each audio stream, which can be rendered by a separate codec, is controlled by its own DMA engine, allowing a flexible use of available bandwidth. Post-Azalia, PC audio will sound better and be easier to use

Azalia is the emerging PC audio standard and it will be integrated into motherboards for the next generation of CPUs



At first glance, it might appear strange that Intel is heading up the consortium working on a next-generation PC audio standard. But as the company never tires of reminding people, it does a lot more than just make Pentiums. For the pre-eminent position of the CPU in the computer industry, and by default the motherboard which provides the glue holding a PC together, means Intel has its fingers in many technological pies from interconnects to graphics, memory and yes, audio too.

Called Azalia, the new standard is designed to replace the ageing AC'97 audio format that is slowly fragmenting under the demands of new hardware and driver and codec instability. One important factor in this is the rise of home theatre formats such as Dolby and DTS 5.1, THX Surround EX and the emerging 6.1 and 7.1 channel solutions. These require much higher bandwidth than is currently available via the PC motherboard.

Another key goal for the Intel-led working group is multi-independent audio streaming. "Something we want to do is provide the ability for people to say, play an online game using 5.1 surround sound audio, as well as allowing them to talk in real-time to other players through a headset without those audio streams mixing," explains Intel's technology initiatives manager, **Thomas Loza**.

This will be accomplished thanks to Azalia's capacity for handling up to 15 separate audio channels, each with its own Direct Memory Access (DMA) engine at resolutions of up to 24bit/192KHz. Another knock-on effect of this extra bandwidth is that Intel hopes Azalia will offer much better voice recognition features to business users as it should be able to support high quality 16-element array microphones.

The specification is currently at version 0.7, and the standards group is expected to release version 0.9 by the end of this year. The first hardware using Azalia is currently expected to ship during mid-2004 and will be included the next generation of Intel CPUs.

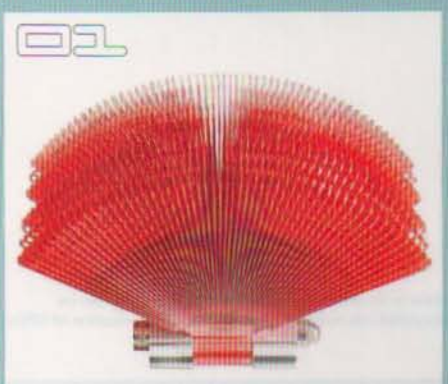
Microsoft has announced support for the standard will also be retrospectively added to Windows XP and 2000 operating systems, while it will be handled natively in the forthcoming Longhorn OS.

Explain that again!

According to Intel's Thomas Loza, Azalia defines the link and protocol for integrated audio in the PC. "It's not a software standard. Instead it's designed with a common bus and function driver topology in mind," he explains. This fusion of hardware and software should offer users great advantages. Part of Microsoft's unified audio architecture approach, Azalia will ensure that an audio device, such as a microphone or headphones, can be identified just by being plugged into the PC jack. It will also ease the burden of driver support as all Azalia hardware will be enabled by one Microsoft driver, although additional functionality can be enabled by the hardware vendors' proprietary drivers too.

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE

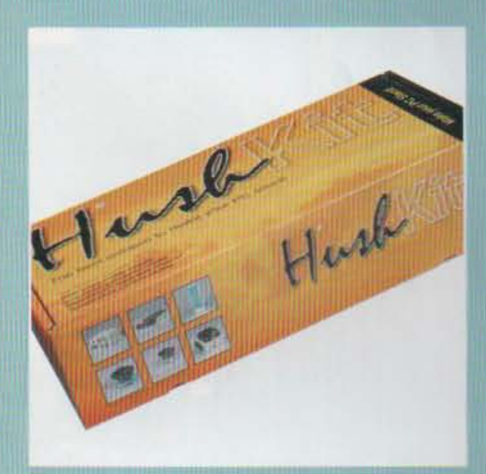
01



Apparently, this is a heatsink. Attach these all over your body to get rid of that sticky summer heat



And this little fellow is a quiet power supply. Put your ear close to the page. Hear that? No? *Exactly*





Mummify your HD in this, and you'll no longer hear it whir and chuckle. Is there an Xbox or PS2 model?

02



Take a link to the past with this homebrew version of *Ocarina of Time*. Well, when it's finished anyway



01 Edge's biggest fan

UK: The tensest moments in firstperson shooters come not when you're surrounded by hundreds of enemies, but when you're not. Listen. Absolute silence, except the tip-tip-tip of claw on metal, and the sound of your own heart beating. Except, if you're anything like the majority of PC owners, what you really hear is the frantic whir of system fans as your fans struggle to cool the heat generated by *Half-Life 2*. You could always pretend it's a half-assed in-game alien air-conditioning system, **Edge** supposes, but what you really need is Quietpc.com's Hush Kit, a set of replacement fans and heatsinks designed to all but eliminate redundant system noise. Installation isn't recommended for novices – bits need to be screwed, glued, and thermal-pasted deep inside your system's arcane workings, and now **Edge** has two screws and a cable left over and can't for the life of it work out where they go – but the tech savvy should have no problems in shutting that incessant hum once and for all. The Hush Kit costs £109. More details at www.quietpc.com.

02 A link to the past

US: Ludicrously ambitious, arguably pointless, totally desirable and exceptionally cute. No, **Edge** isn't talking about its audition tape for the next series of 'Pop Idol', but **Daniel Barras'** *Zelda* remake project. You see, Daniel is a huge fan of *Ocarina of Time*, *Majora's Mask*, and *The Wind Waker*, but he believes they could be *even better*. "Using sprites, sounds, and tiles that I ripped, or edited from the SNES game *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, or made myself..." he states on his Website, using an ellipsis to elicit the kind of pause a well-practised stage magician would be proud of, "I will recreate these 3D games in a 2D setting, one after the other!" Well, that shouldn't take long, should it? See more screenshots and download the current work-in-progress from www.danielbarras.com

Soundbytes

"Although videogame playing may seem to be rather mindless, it is capable of radically altering visual attention processing."
Researchers at the University of Rochester reveal that gamers score better in reaction tests, particularly when the tests are similar to the games they've been playing. Amazing

"There are some very avid videogamers in the military. The people who have been playing videogames all their lives seem a lot more comfortable in some of these kinds of environments."
Lt Cmdr Russell Shilling of the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California comments to 'Wired' on news that action videogames sharpen the mind

"Absolutely. Also, I've also heard that videogame players make better lovers as they're used to staying up late."
'BBC News Online' reader 'Del' responds to the same news on the site's 'Talking Point' section

03 GBA CD

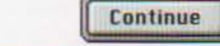
Sweden: That Sony's PSP (PlayStation Portable, or Possibly Slightly Pretend) will use, in concept at least, disc-based media shouldn't be a surprise. And given the capacity of the medium, surely Nintendo's SP Ex Plus Alpha will follow suit? Well, it doesn't matter if it doesn't, because two students at Halmstad University in Sweden have produced an ATA/ATAPI interface for the GBA. Eh? What? Oh, do pay attention. Lysek and Perrson's device lets users connect a standard PC storage device to their handheld, like a hard drive or CD-ROM, increasing the cartridge storage space to something to turn the boffins at Sony GameCube purple with envy. Currently the design is more functional than sexy, but if it gets miniaturised, and if it's silver, and if someone makes a link-cable to an iPod… see more at www.gbacd.tk/

04 Horticultural crossing

Japan: So *Animal Crossing* is a lot like real-life gardening, right? You tend to it daily, keep it tidy and plant new things, and soon you're reaping your reward in exciting fruit, gaily coloured furniture and outrageous outfits. Then you get lazy, your friends leave you, and you end up alone, wandering a landscape wrecked with weeds and rubbish. Or maybe that's just **Edge**. Regardless, Banpresto's decision to licence *Animal Crossing* likenesses for a new range of plantpots seems fitting. The pots have three designs, and each comes with an illustrative sign and figurine – tune-playing pooch KK Slider, angry mole Mr Resetti, or bizarre curio Gyroid. Sadly, the plants aren't included, and although a friend in another town was happy to send one through, **Edge** can't work out where to insert the 20-digit alpha numeric code.

05 Sweetness and fight

UK: The world's first edible peripheral? Provoked by the pages of **Edge**, Daryl Leigh has launched his own performance-enhancing add-on, Xstals. Inspired entirely by videogames, the function of the sweets is based on the stim packs of *Doom*, their name on the crystals in *Skies of Arcadia*, and their packaging on Nagoshi-san's critique of the Dreamcast VMU. A blend of caffeine, guarana and trehalose (a "multi-functional sugar"), the sweets have a tuck-shop taste that sent **Edge** into a nostalgic swoon. As for their stimulating properties, **Edge** is too busy twitching to comment.



The Cassandra Project
Deus Ex mod; somewhat more than big guns and monsters
New names
The **Edge** hive mind finally finds someone to absorb
Wario Ware, Inc
"It's Link! Move him into the cave! Talk about a great game!"

Quit

The Press Association's Ikaruga review
"Substandard graphics"? "Not much gameplay"? Christ…
Sega takeover talk
Bored now. Can't you just make up your mind, you corporate hussy?
The Internet
Is it **Edge**, or is everyone on it a lunatic?



On the left, a CD drive. In the middle, a Game Boy Advance. And on the right, a big interface



On the left, Michal Lasek. On the right, Tobias Persson. And in the background, a big interface





Will it be pot number one, where Gyroid promises to guard your plant with warbly, spooky gyrations?



Or will it be pot number two, where KK Slider plans to rock your horticultural world every Friday night?



Or will it be pot number three, where angry, angry Mr Resetti will threaten any nearby herbivores?





Much like the GBA SP, Xstals come complete with a silvery finish and no headphone socket





"This isn't what I meant when I asked the DM if he could make me like a horse down below"



The forum on which the hack was announced, discussed, and disputed. Web forums rock!!!



Bonfire Night always filled the goth-y community of *Shadowbane* with happiness and unfettered joy…



And fire. Lovely glowing destructive fire. Home-of-Satan fire. "Now where's my pentagram?"

07

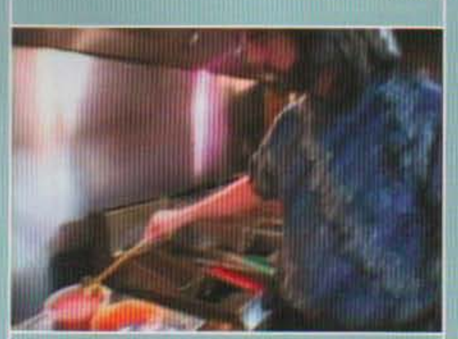


Wallace & Gromit Wensleydale; hopefully just the first in a new wave of videogame footstuff freebies

08



'True Life – I'm a gamer': destroying the myth that players are obsessive, moronic and sexless nerds



Pac-Man virtuoso Billy Mitchell uses *that* hand to stir some hot sauce. Observe the stirring technique

06 MMPR? Gee…

US: It's not easy running an MMRPG, you know. It's a service industry, so you have to deal with the public, even though they're whiny, ungrateful cretins. And when you've dealt with them, you have to make sure they don't stop their subscriptions which fund your salary, and *then* you have to drum up publicity to attract some more. Imagine purgatory filled with people pretending to be elves. And that's without even considering the hackers, who delight in breaking your beautiful toy. Take *Shadowbane*, which, it's fair to say, hasn't turned out to be the *Everquest*-rival Ubi Soft might have hoped it would be. Just a few weeks ago, the game came under attack from a group of 'leet individuals who unleashed terribly mean creatures in neutral zones, stole characters' weapons and armour, and in one spectacular instance transported an entire town to the bottom of the sea. Thankfully, the world overlords were able to right all the wrongs within hours, and ban the mysterious, unidentified felons, leaving nothing but a piece of charming publicity for the struggling game. And here was **Edge** thinking serendipity was the name of a Level 7 tree spirit…

07 Gromit definetly not vomit

UK: A word of advice to other companies attempting to inveigle their way into Out There: the best way to **Edge**'s heart is via our stomachs. Our favourite freebie this month is some cheese.

08 MTV: Yuo + LOs3r!!!

US: 'True Life – I'm a gamer' could have destroyed the myth that the gamer is a sexless, moronic and obsessive nerd, but that wouldn't have made Good TV. It could have shown us articulate, trendy twentysomethings messing around with *EyeToy* or frying their brains with *Rez*, but that wouldn't have made Good TV. So what does make Good TV? Hey! A bunch of sexless, moronic and obsessive nerds. In detail: Fata1ity, a pro-gamer who has made over $150,000 in gaming tournaments, and has a stuffed tiger called Smoo; a group of seven guys who live in a gaming house and call themselves The Order of Light, despite the fact they all work the night shift at the local Fed Ex plant; and, gloriously, ex *Pac-Man* champion Billy Mitchell, who burned out after achieving the mind-numbingly dull *Pac-Man* 'perfect game' and turned his attention to the family restaurant. He now claims to know more about chicken wings and hot sauce than anybody else in the world. Wakka. Wakka. Wakka.

Data Stream University Edutainment Special!

Definition of a supercomputer: **a device capable of over 1 Gigaflop**
Definition of a Gigaflop: **1bn operations per second**
Capability of the PS2 'Emotion Engine': **6.5m operations per second**
Current cost of PS2 in the US: **$200 (£120)**
Number of PS2s networked together by the University of Illinois: **70**
Cost of network, including cable, Linux kits, and Hewlett-Packard Switch: **approximately $50,000 (£30,000)**
Name of network: **Beowulf Cluster**
Speculative capability of system: **half a trillion operations per second**
Is it a supercomputer, then?: **yes**
Limiting factor: **32Mb of memory**
Current task: **calculating quantum chromodynamics**



09 Masters of Doom

Like a Greek drama but without much of the pathos, 'Masters of Doom' – the story of id software – is a cautionary tale of relationships in the games industry. Two bright young things, Alfonso John Romero and John D Carmack II, meet at Softdisk, an Apple II development house in the late-'80s. One insular, seemingly to the point of autism, the other gregarious to a fault, together they revolutionise the industry.

Fragging, online deathmatch, glorified gore and violence and cutting-edge 3D graphics make up id's legacy. Of course, much of this tale, *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Doom*, *Quake*, Ferraris, lots of Ferraris, the final bust-up, is public knowledge. To his credit however David Kushner has also uncovered a deeper web of interactions, for the history of id encapsulates other players. Epic's Mark Rein was its shortlived biz guy, veteran designer Sandy Petersen did a stint, Michael Abrash helped on *Quake's* 3D code, Tom Hall was one of the original Softdisk-era founders. But in the end, all, even one-time best buddy Romero, failed to meet up to Carmack's unwavering standards. The result; a stream of forced resignations, which denuded the company of anyone who could challenge Carmack's power and drive for technical excellence.

Indeed, it's a mark of Kushner's resolve that despite his access to Carmack, he doesn't pull any punches when it comes to his conduct. A technical genius, sadly Carmack also personifies the socially inadequate stereotype of the game geek. The fact remains: id was at its greatest when Romero and Carmack worked together. Maybe that's the real tragedy.

10 Secrets of the Game Business

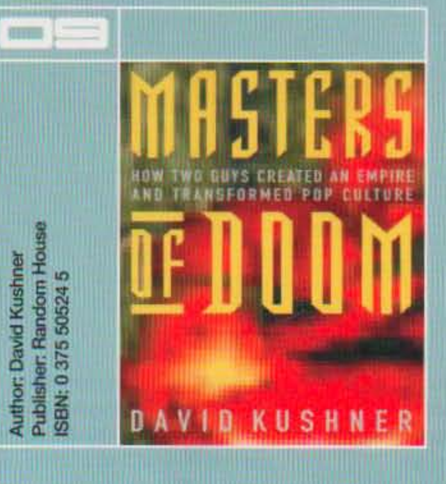
Let's get one thing straight – this is not a book about the secrets of the game business, no matter what the title says. The correct version should be 'a potted version of how the game business works'. You won't uncover any secrets reading this book, although that's not to say you won't learn anything.

Partly the problem is the industry consists of such a complex mixture of art, technology, contract law, business development, localisation and quality assurance, a 350-page book is only going to provide a somewhat cursory overview. More generally, the book also suffers from a lack of well documented case studies. Too often the impact of examples is negated by a lack of real-world figures for royalty payments, advances, milestone payments, slippage fines and the rest. One classic is the story of a Texas-based studio which almost shuts down when its publisher/owner goes bust. For some reason, no company names are used – hardly a great example for a book boasting the word 'secret' in its title.

Another surprise is lack of the big hitting insiders one might expect. Sega's director of external publishing Kathy Schoback is highest profile contributor, while Ed Bartlett, the Bitmap Brothers' business development director the only European developer.

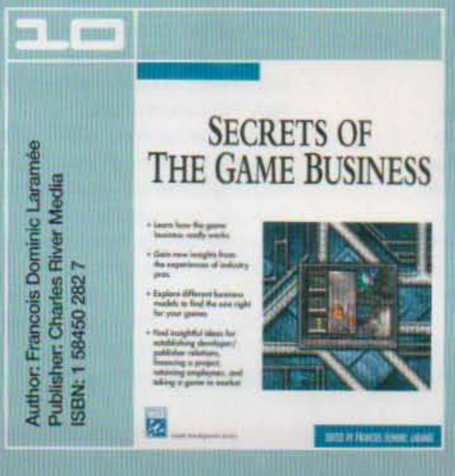
But if there's less juice than expected, 'Secrets of the Game Business' should be required reading for anyone considering setting upon their own or wanting to improve the working practices of their existing studio. Just remember it's not rocket science. Maybe the next edition should be called 'Common Sense of the Game Business'?

09



Author: David Kushner
Publisher: Random House
ISBN: 0 375 50524 5

10



Author: Francois Dominic Laramée
Publisher: Charles River Media
ISBN: 1 58450 282 7

11



Site: Retro Remakes
URL: www.remakes.org

11 Website of the month

Never go back, they say, the implication being that when you do you'll inevitably be disappointed by the poor graphics and monotone melodies. Retro Remakes is an index of people trying to change that – people who are preserving classic dynamics, but updating them for modern systems. From *Advanced Lawnmower Simulator* to *Zub*, there's a hell of a lot of memories to work your way through, and while many of the projects are still in beta, alpha, or before, many more are wonder IP-infringing tributes to games gone by. Well presented and regularly updated, what better way to spend those hot office days than infringing on your company's IT usage policy and giving those rose tinted memories a new coat of paint?

12 Advertainment

Japan: Sony continues to really push the online aspect of the PS2 in Japan (more so than in other territories, it would seem) and so for the second month in a row Advertainment features Network Adapter-related joy.



All is silent. The concentration is almost palpable.



"Hey, you're not trying a 'two-on', are you?" says one golfer, his words physically disrupting the player.



"Are we going to see another one man show from our Mr Suzuki?" asks another. The words hit again.



"We just want to admire your superb technique." "But if you hit your ball too far you may fly with it."



"Hah hah hahah hah hahah," they laugh as the man is bombarded by short, sharp speech bubbles.



Voiceover: "Chat is going to thrill you! *Minna no Golf Online!*" The man finally manages to get a swing in.



"Foooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooore!" screams one player. And it's 'sayonara' Mr Suzuki.

Redeye wakes. Horizontal, with a headache. Surprise. Bound to a table, gagged and blindfolded. Slightly more surprising. But, with no recollection of the events that have led him to this point, and despite the blindfold, he knows exactly where he is. Well, almost because of the blindfold, really, but also because of the smell of rust and brine, and the gentle rocking which presses the ropes against him, first on one side, then the other. Hypnotic. Sickening.The Captain.

"Mmmfng mmfng!" says RedEye, more anger than distress. A hand, fingers thick and rough with callouses, moves between RedEye's cheek and the piece of cloth tied around his mouth. There is some fumbling and guttural swearing in an accent that RedEye is all too familiar with, and then the material is wrenched away…

"—cking why?!" asks RedEye, mouth free to form those all-important vowel sounds and double would we?" There's the glint again. "Not when The Captain's got something important to show him."

The final loop of rope slips off RedEye's chest and onto the floor, and he sits up, raising a hand gingerly to the back of his head. Goddamn. Why can't RedEye have normal friends? Comes with the job, I guess… ah, yes. The Job. If RedEye's column had crossheaders the next one would read, "The Captain: Origins."

See, The Captain ran a shop. An indie games shop on the south coast, serendipitously located around the corner from an old girlfriend of RedEye's. The shop became RedEye's dealer, and he and the shop owner became good friends. But the shop owner had a secret, as dark as they're prone to be; he was becoming a collector.

You should never mix business with pleasure. It's a maxim close to RedEye's heart, the torture of being financially dependent on something you love

"Oh shit," said the shop owner, falling in love and becoming The Captain.

Did the tramp have any idea what he was selling? Perhaps not, but even so, the ship cost everything The Captain owned, plus what was left of the windfall. And, oh it was worth it. On board, everything Sega had produced since the mid-'80s. A complete set. The collector's dream. And enough space to store every other piece of gaming esoterica in his collection, and enough space to collect more. It cost him everything – his friends, his family, his fiancée – but God, it was worth it. He had it all, just as he still has.

A week later, all land business dealt with and everything packed into crates, he set sail. Into the sunset, as the credits start to roll. As the boat reached the horizon, touching distance from the dipping sun, it stopped. And there it remains, as The Captain still isn't sure where he's going.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Yo, ho, ho and a bottle of rheum

punctuation marks. "Why?!" Every time the same! Captain, why?!"

"Captain? Who's he? I could be anyone!"

"Anyone with a 40-ton sea freighter and a fetish for kidnapping."

"Fair point, lad," the Captain laughs, grabbing RedEye's blindfold and dragging it up and out of position. The artificial light is blinding at first, coming as it does from a brilliant white lightbulb suspended a few metres above RedEye. But soon the pupils dilate and he's able to focus. First on the room, a cavernous metal space with generic firstperson-shooter crates stacked haphazardly against the walls, and rudimentary furniture in the centre. A metal stairwell leads both up and down.

And then on the Captain, who bends over RedEye, grinning. Suited in a traditional sailor's outfit and a bright yellow mac, he looks like Drake from *Advance Wars*, but real, and with all the stubble and odour that entails. As always, he is grinning, and carries a glint in his eye, which may be mischief, or may be scurvy. Something about seeing him softens RedEye's attitude. Perhaps it's just sympathy for the sub-normal.

"You can just ask me to come over, you know. You can stop all this, the ropes, the coshing…"

The Captain laughs. "It's all part of The Captain experience!" He begins untying the ropes. "Besides, we wouldn't want RedEye saying no,

painfully evident in the weary way he's come to regard videogames. For The Captain, though, it was the reverse. He got into the business first, but soon the pleasure began to consume him.

And though it burned slowly at first – Saturn sticks surreptitiously sneaking their way into his living room, Sonic display stands never actually making it as far as being displayed – his position at gaming's frontline, the thrill of all those new and shiny toys, meant the fire soon raged out of control. Still, while space was getting tight, the shop was doing okay, and a cash windfall from a fortunate death in the family kept things shipshape… until his ship came in.

A dark and stormy night, just like any other climax of a fairytale. He lived in the flat above the shop. It was shut at this time of night, of course, but he'd never let a fellow gamer's cry for help go unanswered. Even if he was a rum-sozzled, rain-soaked tramp, which was the case here.

"Buy, sell, or part exchange?" he asked, ushering the sodden customer into the shop.

"Sell," said the visitor, spreading the blueprints for a 40-ton ship emblazoned with the Sega Swirl on the counter.

Flashback over, headache and rope burns soothed by a generous shot of whisky, RedEye turns to The Captain and asks him why he brought him here. The Captain smiles.

"I just wanted to show you my collection," he says, accent slipped.

"The ship cost everything The Captain owned. And, oh it was worth it. On board, everything Sega had produced since the mid-'80s. A complete set"

"But you've shown it me before."

"I know. But I thought you might want to see it again" his voice tails off. He motions at the crates. "Beautiful, isn't it?"

"Yeah," says RedEye, looking at his empty glass. "It is." The pair sit in silence for a while. "Ever think about… playing them?" asks RedEye.

"What?" asks the Captain. "But they'd lose all their value!"

There is a long pause. The slow creak of metal is a metronome. The sound of the seagulls is louder than ever.

"I have to go," says RedEye.

The Captain doesn't reply. Just stares at the crates, and while his mouth is still smiling, his eyes are as empty as the glass in RedEye's hand.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Time to dip into the second-tier pile

Like many videogame commentators, I am sometimes guilty of writing as though the entire industry exists only for the sake of that handful of AAA games every year that, flawed or not, loudly push the envelope of what is possible in our medium. On the one hand, there is of course nothing wrong with celebrating the achievements of such games as *Halo*, *Ico*, *Rez*, *MGS2* and so on, because it is these games that (we hope) are dragging the industry kicking and screaming into a brighter and more creative future. On the other hand, referring exclusively to the merits of such a quartet (replace any with your own favourites, naturally) tends to undervalue the pleasant surprises that, now and again, can crop up in games that may otherwise be overlooked as 'mediocreware'. So this month, as I'm feeling in a generous summer mood, I'd like to celebrate a couple of excellent things in second-tier games.

The genre of American sports games is not exactly one of my favourites, so there was no instant thrill of anticipation the day *NBA Inside Drive 2003* landed on the doormat, courtesy of the generous folk at Microsoft. In fact, it lay gathering dust in the 'to be played, one day, maybe' pile for a good few months. Then one evening, when a friend was staying, I loaded it up in the mild hope of some quick, disposable twoplayer entertainment. It turned into a long night, and then into a long weekend. On the Sunday we even played it for breakfast: most unusual for this cynical old hack. I actually came to learn the rules of basketball, which had never previously struck me as a necessary or life-enhancing thing to do.

Why is *Inside Drive* so moreish? The character models and animation are good, but not spectacularly so. The controls are fine, if a little confusing in heavy traffic. But what makes the game so richly entertaining is the audio commentary. Now, we know that commentary in sports games is usually a compromised thing. We laugh indulgently at the appalling efforts of the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series ("The sun is beating down, and the wind is whistling through the stadium" – again?). The *FIFA* games do it better, but not brilliantly. We get used to delays in commentary response, a small pool of repetitive prerecorded one-liners, and commentators who, in blissful ignorance, often flatly contradict what is happening on screen, with a mildly amusing effect of unintentional humour. The compromises have become comfortable.

So when a game like *Inside Drive* arrives, it's a minor revelation. It has the best videogame commentary I have ever heard: better, in fact, than I had assumed was currently possible. The three men in the booth not only describe the plays with pinpoint accuracy and comment on the game performance of specific players with praise or snide remarks, criticising shot choice and lauding team tactics, but also launch off on little riffs of comic interplay and spin elaborate metaphoric fantasies. The contribution of ex-NBA player Kenny 'The Jet' Smith is particularly funny, especially when he is reminiscing about the days of chain-link baskets and making a demented 'ker-ching' noise; and meanwhile, the stadium announcer is saying subtly surreal things over the PA, which you can only just hear over the crowd noise. The sheer quantity of audio is staggering – we must have logged 30 hours on the game, and we were still being distracted from slam dunks because we were laughing too hard at new jokes.

Commentary this good is not just a cosmetic device; it adds another dimension to the game atmosphere. The commentators sound like they are really watching – and being entertained by – what you are doing. Which means you have more fun doing it. The possibility of impressing the commentators seems to exist, and so it adds another layer of motivation to the game.

My second small epiphany recently has been with *SOCOM: US Navy SEALs*, but not in the way I expected. The online component is certainly entertaining, if glitchy. (In one of my first games I happily ran rings around five SEALs and shot them all to death, only to be vigorously abused by an orthographically challenged chat-typist after the game for cheating: apparently, from the point of view of my victims, I was stuck inside a wall and couldn't be shot. I suppose that's called using the environment to your advantage.) Arguably, few people would bother to look twice at *SOCOM* if it lacked the online component. Nevertheless, it was in the oneplayer mode that I was most impressed: by the little-remarked fact of its voice recognition.

The headset that comes with the game of course enables voice chat online, in a manner that is familiar to Xbox Live users, but it seems to me to be more revolutionary that it can be used to command NPCs in singleplayer *SOCOM* missions. Being able to shout "Bravo, deploy frag!" and receiving a marine "Hoo-ah" in response, watching your soldiers do just that, and finally having the radio crackle to life again with "Deployed, sir!", deepens the immersion considerably. Since you can interact with your computerised comrades through the natural medium of the spoken word rather than struggling with command icons (as in, say, *Conflict: Desert Storm*), they seem intuitively more like real people, and in consequence the player feels more satisfaction in leading them. The workmanlike nature of the rest of the game, in architectural and tactical terms, may easily be forgiven. But after this, one can easily imagine such a facility appearing in a really top-notch squad shooter, or something like *Halo 2*, and setting new benchmarks for a sense of military involvement.

> "When a game like Inside Drive appears, it's a minor revelation. It has the best commentary I have ever heard; better than I thought possible"

Perhaps it's no coincidence that both of these small videogame wonders – *Inside Drive*'s commentary and *SOCOM*'s voice recognition – work in the realm of sound. Musical score aside, the auditory experience of videogaming is often taken for granted – you can't hear it in screenshots, after all; and one generally notices it particularly only when the sound is unusually good or bad. But these two touches of brilliance show that what may be to come in the relatively immature field of 'interactive audio' can enhance the videogaming Gestalt at least as much as the next generational shift in visual aesthetics.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

Hi everybody! I've just got back from E3, and I'm furious! Really! I mean, nowadays I'm angry all the time, but the other day there was a point when I got particularly annoyed. Why was I that angry? Well, I brought my own personal mask for SARS to E3. But nobody was using them at the airport, or even on the show floor. So I didn't get to wear my mask at all, and I came back to Japan without it having been used. What a waste of time! I thought people were concerned…

A-ha! No, I'm just joking. It is not because of SARS that I'm so angry. No, it's the impression I got from E3.

Now, I went there with the two titles I'm currently working on. I'm speaking, of course, about *F-Zero AX* and *GX*. Both had good feedback from the people who when you are producing original content. And there is no challenge in playing them, either – people are soon going to be bored. Of course, if you actually play these games in depth, you might recognise that they are trying to introduce new elements, new experiences. But you don't get that strong feeling of "This is it!" any more – which is the feeling that only comes from new franchises and new ideas.

And I believe users are feeling the same. Even looking at the dynamic state of the game industry overseas, it doesn't take much to notice that more than 80 per cent of the content displayed at the show was made of sports licences, movie licences, military stuff and stealth action. That makes a lot of games but not necessarily any 'new experiences'. A lot of entertainment experiences, but not a lot of variety. And this is troubling to me.

Technology has improved so much that we are approaching a point where we'll be able to make videogames that don't look a million miles away from actual reality, which means that using popular licences or comfortable materials in titles represents an increasingly (relatively) risk-free solution in business terms.

To be honest, if you've watched the trends of the last few years closely, this can't come as a surprise. It certainly hasn't to me. So, rather than only an improvement of the emotions you have through visual recognition, I'm trying to make it clear how it is better to focus on making games fun to play, changing the game experience itself rather than just the characters within it.

Now, I know all of that may sound obvious. But if we don't do it, I fear users will forget the infinite variety of experiences that videogames have the potential to provide, that they *should* provide.

And that's been the real worry on my mind since E3 – not that western games are leading, but that the whole industry is heading in the wrong direction. Again, it's nothing new within the videogame world. 'Risk-free solutions' or 'easy-to-sell trends' have been part of this industry – and I would presume every other industry – for many years, and I keep telling myself that there is nothing wrong with this – the desire to make money with little risk of losing it. Still, it does not make me comfortable.

Years ago, we had a similar case when fighting games or beat 'em ups were all very popular, and all of a sudden there were tons of them flooding the market. To me, it looks like we are heading for the same thing all over again.

Walking through the halls of this year's E3, you saw the same titles everywhere. Nothing has changed, I think to myself. But actually it has. Like I said at the beginning, what is different this time is that the starting point is no longer Japan, as it has always been traditionally. This time the initiative is coming from overseas.

And this is where my national pride takes over. "What the hell is going on?" I want to scream. "Come on, Japan! Stand up! Until very recently, you were the Empire of Videogames, weren't you?"

And that, **Edge** readers, is why I feel so angry these days. And that is what has motivated me to begin work on a new project from this moment. I want to make a difference at the next E3. Yes. Wait for what I will show you. I'm going to…

Ahem. Just keep an eye on my work, OK? See you!





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

What is happening to Japanese game development?

attended the show. I was so relieved!

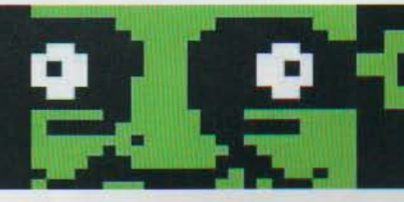
You know, **Edge** readers, I'm always telling you how tired I am, but I've invested so much of my life in these two games!

Anyway, what revolted me was the very alarming – and obvious – lack of movement in the Japanese game industry. I don't think there was anything to be satisfied about, including myself. In contrast, I was impressed by the apparent dynamism of overseas companies, companies like Electronic Arts, THQ or even Infogrames (yes, Atari now). I mean, I found the difference completely unbelievable. And I couldn't stop thinking about it for my stay there, or since I've come back home. If the Japanese game industry continues in this way, without any credible reaction to these western trends, well, we are heading for its annihilation.

Sure, there is a lot of impressive stuff in Japan, which still drags lots of attention and excitement from all over the world. For example, at E3, everyone was going crazy for *Gran Turismo 4*, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* or *Soul Calibur II*… But look, these are all sequels! There is no challenge in creating them, or at least not the same challenge you experience

"What revolted me at E3 was the very obvious lack of movement in the Japanese game industry. There was nothing to be satisfied about"

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4



BIFFOVISION

Page 28, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out

An exorcism of guilt

So there I was, sat in the pub with a colleague, talking about what we'd both been doing the previous weekend. When I enquired after his activities, he started pulling this funny face, his eyes suddenly unable to focus on me. Thinking the Rohypnol might have kicked in, I loosened my belt and suggested he might like to go and "sit down" in the back of my special van. Alas, this wasn't so, and he declined. Face contorted with embarrassment, he revealed how he had embarked upon a 36-hour *Speedball 2* tournament with a friend. Fully expecting me to launch into a five-minute tirade of derisive barking and mocking diatribes, he immediately started to defend himself.

"I know, I know... it's very sad," he lamented. "But it's just... y'know... when we were at university, and stuff... and, and... we... y'know. Sorry."

I hushed him, and bared my own soul. It was a moment of revelation; not only were we fans of what is, frankly, an obscure little retro game, but we were both former Atari ST owners. Within minutes, we were swapping stories like two Vietnam veterans, a decade after returning from a scarring 15-year tour of duty. Sharing our pain. Contrasting our guilt. Flashing our Purple Hearts. So to speak.

The game titles poured forth from our lips like the names of fallen comrades; *Future Wars*, *Midwinter*, *Powerdrome*... We even joined in humming our battalion's anthem – the *Leisure Suit Larry In The Land Of The Lounge Lizards* theme.

We shared a palpable sense of release. To know that you're in the company of a fellow games fan – nay, a fellow games geek – is to know that you're not about to expose yourself by accidentally saying something socially unacceptable. Like how much you're looking forward to *Half-Life 2*, or that the Game Boy Advance SP sometimes makes you horny in a way you can't explain.

But it's stupid; why should we be ashamed of our hobby? Why does it have such a taint of shitness? Why don't we feel able to mention it in polite conversation? How many times have you put 'playing videogames' on the 'Interests' section of your CV, or brought up Solid Snake's subtextual motivation during a dinner party conversation about popular culture's greatest characters? Answer to all of the above: probably never.

The minute you start trying to defend yourself – "No, no, but... games are, like, really sophisticated today, and everything" – the hollow laughing begins, and you just dig yourself an ever deeper hole. Oh, it's all right for them to talk about their poxy bleeding wines, and their Kafka, and Ikea curtains. But if we so much as mention Hideo Kojima, or David Braben, or the PSP, or whatever, we're branded social lepers.

To do so is to open yourself up to being pre-judged. Massmarket entertainment medium or not, there is a stigma attached to calling yourself a games fan. 'Fan' is short for 'fanatic', and 'fanatic' is defined as someone who is 'excessively keen on a hobby, sport, etc'. So what is it that makes other forms of fanaticism more acceptable than gaming?

It has been a continual source of anguish throughout my life that I have struggled to like football. It's a grand irony that I come from a family of football fanatics. I have brothers called Watford and Aston-Villa, while last summer my father had Sven Goran Eriksson tattooed on his chest (by which I don't mean he lay on the floor, as hired goons tattooed a reluctant England manager while forcing him against my father's naked torso... Ahem).

What's more, by and large most of my friends enjoy or play football, and the first two jobs I ever had were working in the sports-heavy environments of bookmakers Ladbrokes and on the scoreboard at Wembley Stadium. Inputting scores. During football matches. Which meant I had to watch the football matches – a job some would have killed for, but which I found as enjoyable as having teeth pulled.

During family gatherings, I'm inevitably reduced to the status of social pariah. Cousins simply do not know what to say to me. Conversations inevitably peter out after the initial greeting, whereupon my relation and I begin staring into our drinks, him muttering "So... football... football" to himself as he struggles to wrap his brain around the concept of a sharing DNA with such an abject oddball. One who, perhaps, might prefer playing – of all things! – videogames, to watching football.

Admittedly, I find football's appeal baffling. Twenty-two blokes, or however many it is, punting some leathery orb around a field? And they're paid how much to do this? And people obsess how much about transfers, and statistics, and lord knows what else? Once you separate football from society's all-embracing love for it, it is, frankly, bizarre.

That said... yes, I find it baffling, but it's not like I don't understand what it is that people enjoy about sport. I can vaguely comprehend the level of devotion. Hell, during the big World Cup games I can almost – almost – become swept up in the national sense of euphoria. I can just about appreciate why you'd nail your loyalty to a team's mast, and get up at 7am to watch England thrash some Third World team to tears.

Nevertheless, argue all you like, but football is stupid. And the level of fanaticism some people display is frankly a little disturbing. But I would never dream of mocking someone for being a football fan.

And yet gamesplayers are fair game for a drubbing. I know some very cool people who could safely claim to be game fanatics – they read the magazines, and foam at the mouth at the prospect of a new *Command & Conquer* sequel – but they wouldn't dare mention their obsession in front of their other friends. Their 'sophisticated' friends.

We're a secret underclass. A hidden sect, or society, with our own language and handshakes. Thing is, for all of that, I'm not sure I'd want it any other way. Do we really want all of them – the snobs, and the derisive saps, and the shitterati – muscling into our club? They'll just spoil it.

"To know that you're in the company of a fellow games fan – nay, a fellow games geek – is to know that you're not about to expose yourself"

It's good to have secrets; the thrill of the illicit affair, the sneaking around, always fades once it's out in the open. I like being one of the only gamesplayers in my family and my circle of friends. I like those moments when I encounter a fellow member of the club, and we can bare our souls. I like knowing who Geoff Crammond is, and being able to remember Gametek. And while they don't know that I know that, I can continue to laugh at them from behind my copy of **Edge**. (Which I invariably hide inside a copy of 'Maxim'. Sorry.)

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

Edge's most wanted

I-Ninja

Fresh, fun and idiosyncratically Japanese. Strange then that it should come from Middlesex-based Argonaut. But will it be able to eclipse Croc?



(PlayStation2) Namco

Fable

Big Blue Box's evolution of the RPG has been in **Edge**'s most wanted more than many games before it. There are doubts, but we remain optimistic.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Ka 2: Let's Go Hawaii

Edge initially misread the subtitle of Sony's mosquito sim as 'Let's Go Halliwell'. Even without Spice Girl celebrity endorsement we're still excited though.



(PlayStation2) SCEI

Magic Pengel: The Quest for Color

Edge isn't sure if its doodling skills are up to the job of drawing its own creatures, but we can't wait to see them evolve and grow.



(PlayStation2) Agetec

Ludditism: the new Futurism

The Future of Electronic Entertainment

When **Edge** was launched, nearly ten years ago, it was with a remit to explore the future of videogames and their associated technologies. Over those years, the magazine has always strived to be the first to report from the expanding frontiers of technological evolution, and it's no different now. **Edge** is still keenly interested in such developments as the PSX, or the cell architecture that's apparently at the heart of the true next-generation of PlayStation hardware, or the fact that Microsoft and Nintendo have both chosen to partner with ATI for their next consoles.

But for some reason, the future of gaming technology doesn't seem as *exciting* as it once did. Perhaps it's just another example of **Edge** getting old and curmudgeonly. Once upon a time, the future seemed an unbearably long way off; now it seems to come round all too soon. Maybe it's just that there's currently little evidence to suggest that any imminent next-generation gaming hardware is likely to offer a paradigm shift to equal the transition to three dimensions.

Or maybe it's the overwhelming hegemony of Sony over the console market. Having dominated for an unprecedented two hardware generations, it still doesn't look like having its crown usurped by Microsoft, and Nintendo continues to be dogged by rumours that it will be forced to exit the hardware market. The chances, then, of any of the recent crop of set-top-box-style would-be entrants are even more minimal and are almost certainly as ill-fated as the likes of the Indrema.

But, perhaps the most significant factor behind **Edge**'s recent inability to get excited about technology is that current standards have yet to be exhaustively exploited. The notion of future technology being abused by publishers who see the likes of *Enter the Matrix* and *Hulk* as the future of gaming isn't an attractive one when there is so far for gaming to go on its existing technology base, and the rise of online gaming isn't quite so enticing when connectivity is still used in conservative ways. The future of videogame technology is only as interesting as the uses to which it will be put, and the best games being created today are as interesting as anything that **Edge** can envisage being developed in the near future. It's just that we're undecided as to whether that's a good thing or a bad thing.



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Rome: Total War

Tortoises, war elephants and flaming pigs. Perfect ingredients for a delicious Roman banquet, and a new benchmark for historical strategy





Should things not go according to plan, an orderly retreat is now possible, as opposed to the full-scale routs of *Medieval* and *Shogun*

'Realistic' and 'cinematic' are often sighed by game-makers in the same reverential breath, despite carrying almost opposite connotations. Both are shorthand for a list of complicated concepts – scale of action, depth of detail, predictability of consequence – but chasing any of these characteristics purely for its own sake can be fruitless. Creative Assembly looks set to demonstrate just what it can deliver when pressed into the service of a robust and flexible game mechanic.

Of course, what it will deliver is neither cinema nor reality, but that blend of spectacle and involvement that only games can offer. And what a spectacle. As the barbarian attackers smash into your troops, the frontline shudders, stretches and then tears open. Issue a defensive formation command and your obedient troops hoist their shields into position in a fluid Mexican wave. There is a shuffle and a stumble as each man locks into place, and then a choreographed wheel as the now impenetrable unit begins to regain ground. The range of animation is matched by the sound – even in the cacophony of battle there is no doubt if sword is striking shield or slicing shoulder.

The extraordinary scale and detail of the battles are not simply a visual achievement. The animation of thousands of troops onscreen must be matched by a mass of AI calculation; route-finding and collision detection for each soldier must be meshed with that of every other individual. The repertoire of each unit has expanded beyond the basic walk-run-fight-die of the game's predecessors. Bending their backs to battering rams, scaling siege towers and squaring up to a cavalry charge: every action is distractingly pretty. Each unit type also has a special attack, which may be as modestly effective as forming a wedge, or as grandiose as unleashing a flood of war-dogs.

"The range of animation is matched by the sound – even in battle, there is no doubt if sword is striking shield or slicing shoulder"



Battle elephants, with their unassailable riders, can turn the tide of battle. The destructive threat they present enemy troops can just as easily be turned against your own men, should they run amok

The implication of this improved graphical presentation is more than aesthetic – it changes the fundamental accessibility of the game. The quantity of detail removes any level of abstraction from the proceedings. The outcome of battle no longer seems decided by numbers invisibly crunched. Any player will have an instant and graphic understanding of the implications of sending a cavalry charge in against spears, or the necessity of maintaining well-ordered formations in the face of a barbarian stampede. Hand-to-hand combat is animated and calculated dynamically, with correct collision monitoring for each individual. The advantage of one weapon type over another becomes a matter for observation rather than a stat memory test. This is not dumbing down – none of the complexity is stripped away – this is streamlining the delivery of information.

The environments are sumptuous, but nothing is purely decorative. Ramparts have defensive value, collapsing under fire with anatomical precision – sheets of plaster sliding off to reveal the stone structure beneath. Buildings – of which there is an enormous and surprising variety, 180 for the Roman settlements alone – are functionally tied into the tech tree: barracks for training troops, blacksmiths for upgrading weaponry. The environments are also vulnerable to natural disasters, with volcanoes, earthquake and storms all promised.

Care has been taken to ensure that the Campaign mode does not become an incremental slog towards total domination. No Roman faction is strong enough at the start to prevail alone, so early alliances and cooperation are essential. While this may produce a force strong enough to see off Greek or Barbarian foes, as Rome's power grows so does the rivalry between the factions. Ultimately, only one can grab the spoils. The politics of Rome have been designed with the idea of an Italian crime syndicate very much in mind.

Consequently, the diplomatic options have been substantially enhanced, with

Living history

The recreation of historical battles is more exacting than was feasible in *Medieval*. Waypoints can now trigger instructions as well as control troop placements, so opponents will switch tactics rather than dumbly proceeding from one location to the next. However, *Rome* is not intended as the re-enactment enthusiast's wet-weather alternative. The value placed on quality of research and historical accuracy is high, but always subsidiary to visual splendour and player satisfaction.

Format: PC
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Creative Assembly
Origin: UK
Release: Summer 2004

Previously in E120

detailed proposals and pacts now possible. Family allegiances are significant, and the players can choose to intersperse their campaign with missions from the Senate.

It is rather terrifying to consider what could be added to the package over the next 12 months. Much work remains to be done on the Campaign mode, and decisions are still being taken on the range of multiplayer options that will be made available. Work is under progress to make map, unit and script editors as accessible as possible, and the team are looking closely at the wish lists of fans of the previous games.

Creative Assembly has a watchword, "The player's time is a valuable resource." If the developer spends its next 12 months on *Rome: Total War* as valuably as it has its last, then **Edge** will have no hesitation in investing heavily.





The improved detail allows individual generals to be recognised on sight. Although the game does not rely on it, it is a factor which greatly enhances the speed and immediacy of battlefield decisions

Seven Samurai 20XX

Format: PlayStatio
Publisher: Samı
Developer: Dim
Origin: Jap
Release:

Previously in E1

Hisao Kurosawa endorses Sammy's sci-fi retelling of his father's epic action film



Just in case the link between Sammy's futuristic re-imagining and Akira Kurosawa's original epic Japanese film isn't entirely clear, let it be known that Sammy's brightly sci-fi vision is fully supported by the Kurosawa-san estate – specifically by the great director's son. According to the publisher, the involvement of Hisao Kurosawa will ensure that *Seven Samurai 20XX* is as faithful a videogame recreation of his father's vision as is possible. However, you'd be forgiven for wondering where the similarities start. To the untrained eye, there seems very little in common between the two apart from the inclusion in both of a team of seven warriors.

Certainly **Edge** can't remember any 'Holy Child' in the original, although the transition to a world in which the last bastion of humanity is beset by mechanical organisms called 'humanoids' seems appropriate enough give the new futuristic setting. Also forgivable is th inclusion of a couple of female samurai, though film fans might be slightly disorientate by the updated character roster. Whereas th old and experienced Kambei did all the recruiting in the movie, the central character *20XX* is a younger ronin called Natoe – though there's still an old and experienced character called Kambei in the game. Likewise, Toshiro Mifune's character, Kikuchiyo, has apparently transmogrified into a rotund midget called Eight.

But while the narrative connections migh be tenuous, Sammy has gathered a substantial talent to work on the title. First, th game is being developed by Dimps, a developer largely drawn from old SNK employees. Then there's the intro music, described as "the very best of my music in th past few years" by its creator, Ryuichi Sakamoto (the award-winning musician behind 'Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence' and 'The Last Emperor' among others). And final there's the French comic book legend, Jean Giraud (aka Moebius), who's responsible for the character design.

The culmination of this creative genius and franchise heritage was looking pretty polished at E3, which showcased the first fe bosses of the game and Natoe's initial ability to wield two weapons at once. Coincidentall it was also looking remarkably similar to *Crimson Sea*, boasting the same profusion o enemies, a similar visual style, and near-identical hack 'n' slash mechanics – which is no bad thing. Indeed it's this aspect of the game that bears most comparison to its cinematic inspiration; Hisao Kurosawa described his father's film as "the perfect action movie." He'll no doubt be hoping that *Seven Samurai 20XX* will turn out to be the perfect action videogame.







Starting with the ability to wield two weapons, Natoe's skills expand over the course of the game, giving him a wider range of actions with which to dispatch enemies and various bosses



Western appeal

This isn't the first time the original 'Seven Samurai' film has been transplanted to a science fiction setting; no, 'Battle Beyond the Stars' got there first, and starred Hannibal from 'The A-Team', Napoleon Solo from 'The Man from U.N.C.L.E.', John Boy Walton, and the racy outfits of Sybil Danning. But the number of times the film has been adapted reveals the curious hold that Kurosawa-san's epic has had over the western imagination. By comparison, *20XX* looks likely to have a rather more niche impact in the west, boasting a visual aesthetic and cut-scene character that's very typically Japanese.

Freedom Fighters

Format: **PC, Xbox, PS2**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **IO Interactive**
Origin: **Denmark**
Release: **September**

Previously in **E**123, **E**125

EA's alternate history urban warfare squad-based action adventure continues to impress

Formerly known as *Freedom: The Battle for Liberty Island*, *Freedom Fighters* doesn't seem to be that high on the busy release schedule priorities of Electronic Arts. But a brief demo of the game is enough to suggest that it will offer a whole lot of dumb fun, delivering up a hokum plot that harks back to '80s Cold War paranoia and an all-out action philosophy to match. This is certainly not a game that harbours any aspirations towards subtlety – or realism for that matter.

So, for example, the game's alternate universe is rammed home with unmissable red and gold neon signs reminding players that this is a world in which the Commie Pinkos from the USSR won the Cold War. Not that this is played for laughs; in fact, it's just played for brash, over-the-top action. Indeed the fact that such a preposterous plot is played so straight somehow adds to the game's B-movie charm, and **Edge** dearly hopes that the overblown, operatic soundtrack that's in place for the demo levels will make it into the finished game. It lends a sense of gravitas to the action that's both absurd and yet strangely fitting.

The action itself is set in the post-apocalyptic streets of New York City, which turn urban warfare into a tactical contest for cover. AI-controlled squad-members are recruited with ease and directed in a manner similar to those in *Brute Force*, with four basic commands mapped to the controller's face buttons. Winning battles, healing fugitives and fulfilling key objectives sees your character (a hitherto mild-mannered plumber, transformed into a psychotic patriot) enhance his charisma, which enables him to recruit higher numbers of squad-members.

And although combat encounters and mission goals are essentially faced in linear fashion, there are a few sections with in-built alternate routes. So, for example, there's one sequence where battling through snowy urban wastes can be directed as a full frontal contest of attrition; or a more subtle approach could be adopted by darting from cover to cover; or it's even possible to take up a sniping position to soften up the enemy before your squad mops up.

The version that **Edge** saw running didn't offer any glimpse of the splitscreen multiplayer modes. It also contained some obvious controller configuration problems, though these will no doubt be smoothed out by the game's release, since it should be a simple task to deliver a wider range of configurable parameters. Even so, it still offers a large amount of unsubtle enjoyment.



Saving New York from the Red Army has never been this much fun – to judge by early playable demos



Inside buildings and outside in the wasted streets, combat is largely a question of keeping your trigger finger depressed while keeping an eye on all available opportunities to retreat behind cover







Recruiting other disgruntled New Yorkers is simple, as is commanding them in combat, and as your charisma increases over the course of the game the band of followers at your disposal also expands. There's not *that* much tactical nuance though; that would get in the way of the bombastic action at the heart of the game

Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death

Format: **PC, PS2, GC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Vivendi Universal/NDA Productions**
Developer: **Rebellion**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q4**

Previously in **E**97, **E**125

Mega-City One's most famous inhabitant prepares to take on the perps this winter







As well as a cooperative multiplayer mode there is a variety of splitscreen head-to-head modes, including the likes of Block War and Umpty Raid that are unique to the Dredd universe. Indeed a variety of faces and places will be familiar to fans, including Psi-Judge Anderson, Resyk and the Smokatorium

When **Edge** first saw *Dredd* in the flesh, back in **E**97, it was one of few forward looking firstperson shooters. Powered by the in-house Asura engine, it was producing visual results that were far in advance of anything else out there. Now, of course, there's a glut of similar titles, with most of them apparently coming out at the end of this year. *Breed*, *Half-Life 2*, *Far Cry* and *Doom III* for example are set to appear between now and Christmas, with the likes of *Halo 2* and *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* to follow in 2004. But while the rest of the genre has caught up visually and technically, *Dredd Vs Death* still looks like holding its own thanks to its authentic imagining of '2000AD's longstanding law maker.

The engine's lustrous comic book shading is still impressive, after all, and the curvy neon architecture of Mega-City One has been captured superbly. If there is an obvious weakness at this stage it's that, in spite of the 30-odd character models that the Asura engine is capable of displaying, the megalopolis still feels oddly quiet for a place that's supposed to boast a population of 400 million citizens. Still, there's plenty of the humorous detail that characterises the weekly comic strip. Female fatties, complete with tremulous breasts, are Rebellion's bid to compete with the *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* babes, for example, while a 'Night of the Living Dead' pastiche is set inside a shopping mall complete with irritating muzak.

This emphasis on authenticity has allowed Rebellion to include a few subtle twists on the traditional FPS formula. The most obvious is the fact that Dredd is obliged to use minimal force; a verbal challenge must be made before any shots are fired, and a lawmeter keeps Dredd's actions in check. Finish a level with a high lawmeter and hidden extras are unlocked; kill too many innocents and the Justice Department will send the rest of the Judges after you. An interesting adjunct to this arrangement is a morale system. While small fry will give themselves up willingly, more desperate criminals can be brought to book by inflicting a few non-lethal injuries, or by taking out their leader.

As the game progresses and Dredd moves through the Undercity and eventually Deadworld, this need for constraint will diminish as human perps give way to undead automatons, but this extra layer of tactical consideration, allied with the recreation of the much-loved Dredd universe will hopefully ensure that the game stands out in a crowded market later this year.



The game's narrative unfolds gradually, starting out with a routine patrol that offers players a gentle introduction to justice Dredd-style. As in *Halo*, Dredd has a reserve of energy that recharges over time





Six different ways to die

For those who aren't familiar with the Dredd universe, every Judge, including Joe Dredd himself, is equipped with a personalised Lawgiver pistol, capable of firing six different types of ammunition. So, in a departure from a traditionally escalating arsenal, the following rounds are available from the very start of the game: Heatseeker, which is useless against the undead; High explosive; Incendiary, which decreases your lawmeter when used to fry humans; Ricochet, which rebounds up to seven times; and Armour piercing, which can fire through some walls. In addition to the Lawgiver one other secondary weapon can be used, such as the Arbitrator, the Justice Department shotgun.

Breed

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **CDV**
Developer: **Brat Designs**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Summer**

Previously in **E**111

The Halo comparisons were frustrating enough before, but now the sequel has pinched Breed's plot. Brat Designs must be feeling just a little cursed

Breed is set on an Earth invaded and over-run, humanity's last hope orbiting on a cruiser recently returned from a war that was believed already won. Sound familiar? But rather than an all-out assault, the premise of the game remains one of hit-and-run guerrilla attacks. Solo soldiers and small teams – sometimes under your control, sometimes autonomous – are dispatched to key locations to harry and undermine the enemy. Team control has been kept to six simple commands, and flicking between members produces a surprisingly strong sense of camaraderie in the face of never quite insurmountable odds. The focus remains fixed on the team, which can be impressively dwarfed by the wider battle but never feels insignificant to its outcome.

The enemy, the Breed, is dynamic and daring: rolling to find cover or leaping from parapets to reach you. The mix of ambushes, snipers, artillery, air support and unexpected re-enforcements means that running battles are constantly evolving, requiring changes of tactics and equipment. The AI is still patchy, with columns of Breed more willing to run into a line of tank-fire than break formation. Firefights still prove satisfying, but rather than feeling like an intelligent enemy, the Breed can give the impression of a dumb enemy intelligently deployed.

The range and design of vehicles is as impressive as promised, with tanks, jet-pods and dropships all available. Controlling them, however, is demanding. The unforgiving, and occasionally unpredictable, nature of their physics is compounded by an awkward choice of view angles. If this can be smoothed out, then the triple challenge of flying/driving, firing and reconnoitering6 simultaneously will prove rewarding.

The expansive geography evident when **Edge** last looked at the game can be used to maximise tactical advantage – scaling a ridge may take you out of artillery range, but leave you vulnerable to sniper fire. Even the most unpromising slope can be scaled, although it can require some patient slogging. The price paid for this geographical freedom is that the path-finding of your team sometimes fails to match your own. Lone gunners can become stranded, body popping in solitary confusion until you take control and rescue them.

Breed faces a tough new world – it has emerged from the shadow of *Halo* to face the boasts of its sequel and those of *Half-Life 2*. It can only hope to answer them by perfecting its own blend of improvised tactical play and adaptive, open battlegrounds.











Although the player is limited to two weapons at any one time, most guns have secondary functions which help to expand the offensive possibilities





As well as artillery emplacements, a number of human and Breed vehicles can be commandeered and used to maximise destructive efforts

Need for Speed: Underground

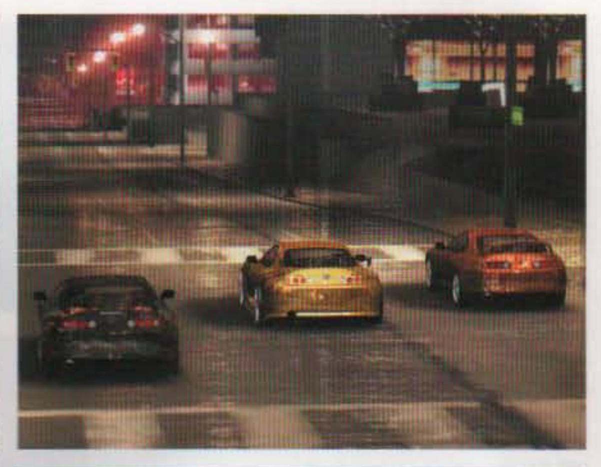
Format: PS2, GC, Xbo
Publisher: Electronic Art
Developer: In-house (EA Black Bo
Origin: U
Release: Novembe

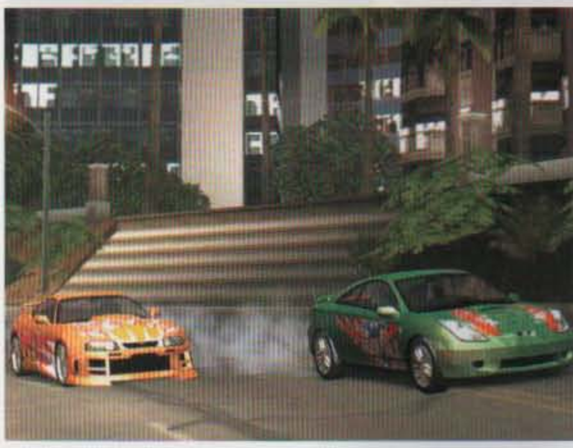
Previously in E12

Step out and meet the mod scene. Leave your PC at home, though – this is an altogether different proposition









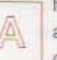






Currently civilian traffic doesn't possess the life of that found in *Burnout 2*, for instance. Similarly, the crash dynamics leave much to be desired and there is still no visual damage. In total, 20 cars feature offering nine performance-enhanceable areas, 20 zones for bodykits and 30 for decal or vinyl sets

Thankfully, at this stage the handling doesn't reveal any area of concern. You'll note nearly all of the shots here are from the Replay mode but rest assured the in-game action retains the impressive graphical level

lthough a laughable film, 'The Fast and the Furious' had a successful cinematic outing. It's hardly surprising – the makers' decision (supposedly inspired by a magazine article on illegal street racing) to tap into the current hot mod culture was an astute one. There is currently an entire generation that has replaced lofty notions of ever owning, say, a Ferrari with the reality of obtaining a more earthly vehicle which, after a little under-the-hood tinkering, can effortlessly performance-match Modena's finest. And, crucially, all for a fraction of the price.

Always quick to spot an opportunity, EA has therefore replaced the traditional automotive pin-ups from its premier racing series with models gamers are more likely to identify with – step in Ford, Mitsubishi, Toyota, Dodge, Subaru and VW (more are expected). While they start off life in the game in (relatively) dull showroom-spec, opportunities for serious tweaking soon present themselves. In this respect the publisher has certainly done its homework: O.Z. Racing, Sparco, MOMO, Neuspeed, StreetGlow, Turbonetics, Enkei, Konig, NOS, Brembo, and HKS are just some of the many licensed aftermarket tuning specialists whose mod parts are included in the game.

Edge hasn't tried the main Underground mode but it works around the principle of building the player's reputation within the street racing scene. Respect is earned via race wins and the mod status of your car, obviously achieved by spending prize money earned from races on enhancing your ride's abilities. **Edge** has, however, taken part in a single race (set in a Chinatown theme) and, more memorably, a four-car downtown drag event (available in 1/4, 1/2 and 1 mile variants). Although essentially a straight line affair, the latter offers its own challenge by focusing the attention on perfect gear shifts – short shift and lose torque, over rev and lose your engine (for those looking for further involvement, an option to operate the clutch manually, via the L3 button, is also offered).

While the nature of the racing dictates the need for the action to take place at night, it does allow the developer to show off its latest visual effects technique. Very impressive stuff, as it turns out – the way street lights stream past and the whole screen trembles as speed increases will be pleasingly familiar to anyone who has witnessed the first drag race from 'The Fast and the Furious' – and ultimately contributes greatly to the strong sense of player involvement. One to watch for.

Hungry Ghost

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEI**
Developer: **Deepspace Software**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **July 31 (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Tokuro Fujiwara, the creator of Ghouls 'n' Ghosts, thinks everyone's going to hell. At least there's a chance you can choose your way to redemption

A follow-up to the slightly disappointing 'panic-action' title *Extermination*, *Hungry Ghost* takes place in a dark and vicious realisation of hell. Tormented souls wander the caverns, threatening and pleading. Playing as either a male or a female (both handily called Chris), and armed with either a stick or a crossbow, the action component of the game takes place in firstperson. However, the main weight of the game is dedicated to the unfolding story.

The structure of the game is entirely open, dependent on decisions and choices made by the player. These look not to be the kind of morally loaded, 'good versus evil' choices offered by many western developed games, but subtler, more abstract decisions. Ultimately, the paths taken, items chosen and souls helped will decide whether or not you gain the chance to escape hell and be reborn. The developer urges players to play through again and again, in order to experience all possible endings.

While **Edge** has reservations about the depth of branching story lines, and the attraction of repeated play-throughs, *Hungry Ghost* looks to offer a more sinister and subtle take on the afterlife than the current spate of supernatural titles.

Although some choices may seem arbitrary, others may have instant and fatal consequences. Edge hopes this does not make the game over-dependent on quick-saves





The game is inspired by the Buddhist and Taoist belief in 'hungry ghosts' – resentful spirits who have not been properly buried or cared for

Yankee Tamashi

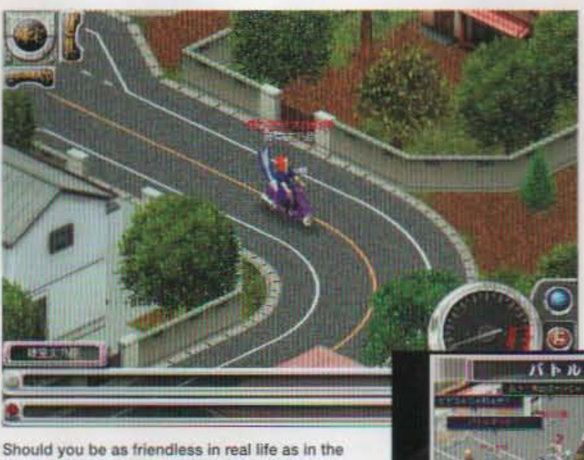
Format: **PC**
Publisher: **SquareEnix**
Developer: **Atelier Double**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

The world's first bicycle gang RPG? SquareEnix sticks a feather in its online cap and calls it macaroni





A bewildering range of hair dos, jogging suits and woven sandles is available for your avatar. No sign as yet of reflective tabards or cycling clips



Should you be as friendless in real life as in the game, fear not – NPCs will be assigned to fill out your Yankee bicycle team formations

Inspired by the phenomenon of Japanese 'Yankee' gangs, who parade the streets with flamboyant bikes and teddy-boy haircuts, *Yankee Tamashi* forms half of SquareEnix's two-pronged attack on the online PC market, alongside the more conventional football game, *Online Striker*.

You start the game, in true RPG style, with no friends and a rusty bicycle. In order to progress, you must recruit gang members, and battle your rivals. This is handled not, as you might expect, by racing, but by fighting. Each gang leader chooses a formation for their riders, and these formations (flower, fire, tornado and thunder) have elemental forces attributed to them. As the seconds tick away to the start of the battle, riders must then select their riding style. These decisions decide the outcome of the encounter, and the winner scoops the EXP. And more EXP means new attack formations and upgrades to scooters and motorbikes.

Although there are detailed towns to cruise, with high schools, restaurants and homes, the game's draw is the level of customisation available. Paint jobs, spoilers and streamers can be combined to ensure you turn heads and attract recruits. Both spokey-dokeys and a European release are as yet unconfirmed.

Black & White 2

Format: PC
Publisher: Electronic Art
Developer: Lionhead Studio
Origin: UK
Release: 200
Previously in E11

The inhabitants of Eden turn their attention from food, football and forestry to all-out war. As their god, will you lead them to Elysium or Armageddon?





Each of the ten lands has its own climate, with rain, snow and fog all affecting the course of battle and the speed of colonisation

The outbreak of hostilities has required that the focus of the game shift more towards traditional RTS concerns. Armies need to be marshalled, sieges waged, weapon technologies researched and built. Military manoeuvres will be complimented with new Epic Miracles, such as volcanoes and earthquakes, which will rip open the ground and unleash rivers of lava. It will be a challenge to ensure that the total freedom of action that characterised the first game remains viable within this more structured footing.

For many the highlight of the first game was the Creature. Chests puffed with pride on finding your giant cow tending the granary, jaws dropped in horror when he started pelting your worshippers with his own faeces. Their role has been expanded for the sequel: as well as aping, lionising and dogging your every step, they will take responsibility for armies on the battlefield, deciding strategies and casting miracles. Beyond the leashes and slaps of the original, they can now be coaxed into obedience with sticks, whips and feathers.

Black & White, although magnificent, was on occasion hobbled by its own ambition. The sequel shows no sign that this visionary zeal has been reined in. **Edge** would expect nothing less.



Buildings, gardens, plants and animals all morph to reflect your moral alignment. Fountains and flowers will give way to stocks and guillotines should you choose oppression rather than benevolence

Space Colony

Format: PC
Publisher: Take 2 Interactive
Developer: Firefly
Origin: UK
Release: Q3

One half tycoon game, one half people sim. Firefly builds on its Stronghold expertise to wheel out a new cut 'n' shut

The foundation of *Space Colony* is the usual sim holy trinity: build, manage, exploit. The player embarks with a crew of misfit astronauts, and must find a promising planet on which to scratch out a fledgling colony. The better the colony is built, the happier the inhabitants. The happier the inhabitants, the harder they work (about which **Edge** is a little sceptical), and the harder they work, the more money you have at your disposal.

Where the game promises to elevate itself is with its cast of cantankerous characters. With wildly incompatible personas, each crew-member has their own requirements; psychiatrists, bars, prisons and discos all have to be built to keep them sane and productive.

A mission structure ensures that expansion doesn't become a linear slog. New colonies must be established, and crew-members carry their grudges and gratitudes from base to base. These are integrated into a wider universe – aliens may visit as tourists or as hostile invaders. Indeed, the planets themselves can turn against you, with volcanoes, earthquakes and even rampant vegetation threatening your colony.

A traditional mechanic, traditionally presented, *Space Colony* might well possess the charm and ingenuity to surpass its roots.



Geriatrics, meat-heads, floozies and bar-flies make up your crew. When trapped in close proximity fights may break out, or blissful liaisons. "Any pairing is permitted," promises Firefly





The game branches according to player choices. Pacifists stay home and build tourist traps, thrill-seekers can select Rescue or Eradicate missions

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Island Thunder

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Ubi Soft**
Developer: **Red Storm**
Origin: **US**
Release: **September**

Beaches, summer houses and dodgy plantations: expect the update to the excellent Ghost Recon to be even brighter and louder



Island Thunder's setting is a post-Castro Cuba and offers some beguiling views but also some deadly revolutionary enemies. The blend of open spaces, more complex building architecture and forest elevation should keep *Recon*-philes happy until the next instalment. Wish you were here?

Depending on how dedicated you were, *Ghost Recon* became quickly repetitive. Not because it was poor, but because it was so addictive. It was a game capable of keeping you engaged in Live multiplayer battles from midnight until dawn, at least for a couple of months. So any update will be greeted with a loud hurrah by fans.

Stat attack: *Island Thunder* will contain an eight-mission singleplayer Campaign mode. Five of these maps are based on those from the *Island Thunder* PC expansion while the other three are singleplayer maps taken from the PC *Desert Siege* expansion and are optimised for Xbox Live play. A further four 'fan favourite' maps from the original *Ghost Recon* will be included for those who missed out on the original.

The three maps **Edge** has played (Plantation, High Sierra and Beach Resort) are more intricate than those in the original. Cover and elevation has been cleverly thought-out while man-made constructions have greater detail and complexity. The graphics and sound have been buffed up and *Island Thunder* even includes a clever 'dynamic Gamma lighting' effect which mimics the iris in the human eye.

As *Island Thunder* represents something of a tasty Milky Way for *Recon* obsessives, a price-point lower than the standard £40 is anticipated.





On current evidence the maps are more complex than those in the original, with better ambush points and terrific use of elevation (top)

Far Cry

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Ubi Soft**
Developer: **Crytek**
Origin: **Germany**
Release: **November**

Previously in **E**112, **E**119, **E**125

It's not far off now, but Crytek's emergent island shooter isn't the only title taking aim at an end-of-year release date





The AI needs a bit of balancing, but it's certainly capable of demanding the utmost in tactical appreciation and accuracy from players



The contrast between rustbucket interiors and the blazing sunshine of *Far Cry*'s island environment demonstrates the versatility of Crytek's game engine, which sacrifices polygon quantity for textural detail with brilliantly beautiful effect

A post-E3 play through of a few levels from *Far Cry* has renewed **Edge**'s optimism for one of the throng of firstperson shooters that will be clogging up release schedules before the end of this year. The most impressive thing is the way in which the game's island environment offers scope for emergent gameplay. While Ubi Soft's PR adviser urged a stealthy underwater route to escape the confines of a boat, a direct approach, followed by a hasty retreat (to draw enemy combatants out of their positions, honest), proved just as effective. Until leaving cover far too hastily a few moments later that is.

The AI still needs a little bit of work, but teams of enemy mercenaries cooperate well to maximise the impact of your mistakes, heightening the sense of being a fugitive surrounded by organised military forces. And the game is technically striking too, featuring indoor environments that compare favourably to what's been seen of *Doom III* before the transition to brilliant exteriors precipitates a surge of brightness that replicates the way the human eye reacts to dazzling light. With so much competition from what is likely to be a crowded Q4, these neat touches and design features will need to be wrapped up in an equally engaging mission structure, but **Edge**'s anticipation is now firmly piqued.

Colin McRae Rally 04

Format: PC, Xbox, PS2
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: In-house
Origin: UK
Release: September

Less than a year after Colin 3, the new McRae game is rolling out of the service area. Codemasters certainly seems to be churning out the rally titles these days





The damage model continues to impress with its authentic complexity. At this stage a little more feeling of speed wouldn't necessarily hurt though

The focus of *CMR3* proved a little too restrictive for some, it would seem, and its creator is releasing the game many apparently were hoping for. More than 20 vehicles are featured, including stars from the banned Group B category; there are new tracks from eight international locations; an enhanced damage system featuring three levels – from normal to unforgiving expert; full set-up and repair options; improved pre-race briefings; the ability to create custom rallies by mixing and matching favourite stages; and improved visuals, of course.

The handling has also been tweaked with physics now based around four pivot points (previously there was only one) which is said to be more realistic although **Edge** isn't entirely convinced by this – at least not yet. If anything, at this stage things feel over-technical, capable of sapping some of the fun present in previous *CMR* games.

One interesting aspect is the inclusion of test stages, where different components of the car are put through their paces. Pass the test and you get to try the part at the next rally. They're essentially fun minigames and a much welcome addition to the series.

It's an interesting proposition – more massmarket than previous *CMR*s in some ways, more harcore in others.



Rally classics such as the Lancia Delta Integrale Evo 2 (above) make a welcome return. But currently the cars tend to float above the track – *CMR* games have had better, more convincing car/environment integration. Still, there's time

The Italian Job: L.A. Heist

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC
Publisher: Eidos Interactive
Developer: Climax Brighton
Origin: UK
Release: September

Four wheels good, two wheels better? The makers of MotoGP are just the men for The Italian Job, at least on the corners...

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the 'homage' is the insincerest form of theft. But whatever indignities Hollywood heaps on this summer's remake, the basic trinity of Minis, stairs and gold remains inviolable.

The main game is split into batches of missions that echo the film plot. Most are timed point-to-point, crossing and re-crossing the tight warren of central LA and the fast, open curves of the Hollywood hills. The radar will only get you so far, however, as targets are tucked away in corners and car parks. Bonus points are awarded for skids and jumps, detracted for crashes and damage. Beyond the main game are a Free-Roaming mode, an exacting series of stunt tracks, and twoplayer circuit races.

Vans, muscle cars and armoured trucks are all available, but the heart of the game belongs to the Mini. Sticky, speedy and obedient, it wills you to corner on two wheels, spray through fountains and scream sideways into boxes. The integration of steps, ramps and roof-tops requires the kind of thinking last needed for *Jet Set Radio*.

With the basics well in place, *The Italian Job* only needs a touch of variety and structural streamlining to blow **Edge**'s bloody doors off. Gotcha.



As Edge has come to expect from Climax Brighton, the game's presentation is classy and confident. Unlockable extras make good use of the licensed content





Although realistic damage is promised for the final version, collisions currently produce little more than plumes of smoke



Prescreen Alphas

This month's announcements and updates...

The Temple of Elemental Evil

Format: PC
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Troika





Based on the very latest D&D pen and paper rules but one of the earliest adventure modules, this boasts a rather interesting party alignment system, which will excite RPG nerds like **Edge**

Magatama

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: TBC





It's too early to tell how this will shape up, though it seems to blend the samurai setting of *Onimusha* with the dramatic action and enemy hordes of the *Dynasty Warriors* series

Metal Slug 5

Format: Arcade, Neo-Geo
Publisher: SNK
Developer: In-house





The game concept will be familiar to anyone who's played any previous *Metal Slug* titles, though this instalment also features souped-up vehicles and a superior level of firepower

Pure Pinball

Format: Xbox
Publisher: TBC
Developer: Iridon Interactive





The first pinball game on Xbox (and one of the very few currently available for consoles) has already made an appearance on the PC. **Edge** plans to take a closer look at this next month

Prince of Persia

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: In-house (Ubi Soft Montreal)





If it can capture the rotoscoping brilliance of Jordan Mechner's original then this could be very special indeed. On the other hand, another limp Game Boy Advance cash-in is not inconceivable

Star Soldier

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Hudson
Developer: In-house





Part of Hudson's retro rerelease imprint, Hudson Family Collection, *Star Soldier* was originally released on the Famicom – though this version is to benefit from a 3D graphical update

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: In-house (Ubi Soft Montreal)





Based on the *Raven Shield* universe, this Xbox episode is a wholly new game, containing 14 new singleplayer missions, nine new multiplayer maps, and full compatibility with Xbox Live

The Lord of The Monsters

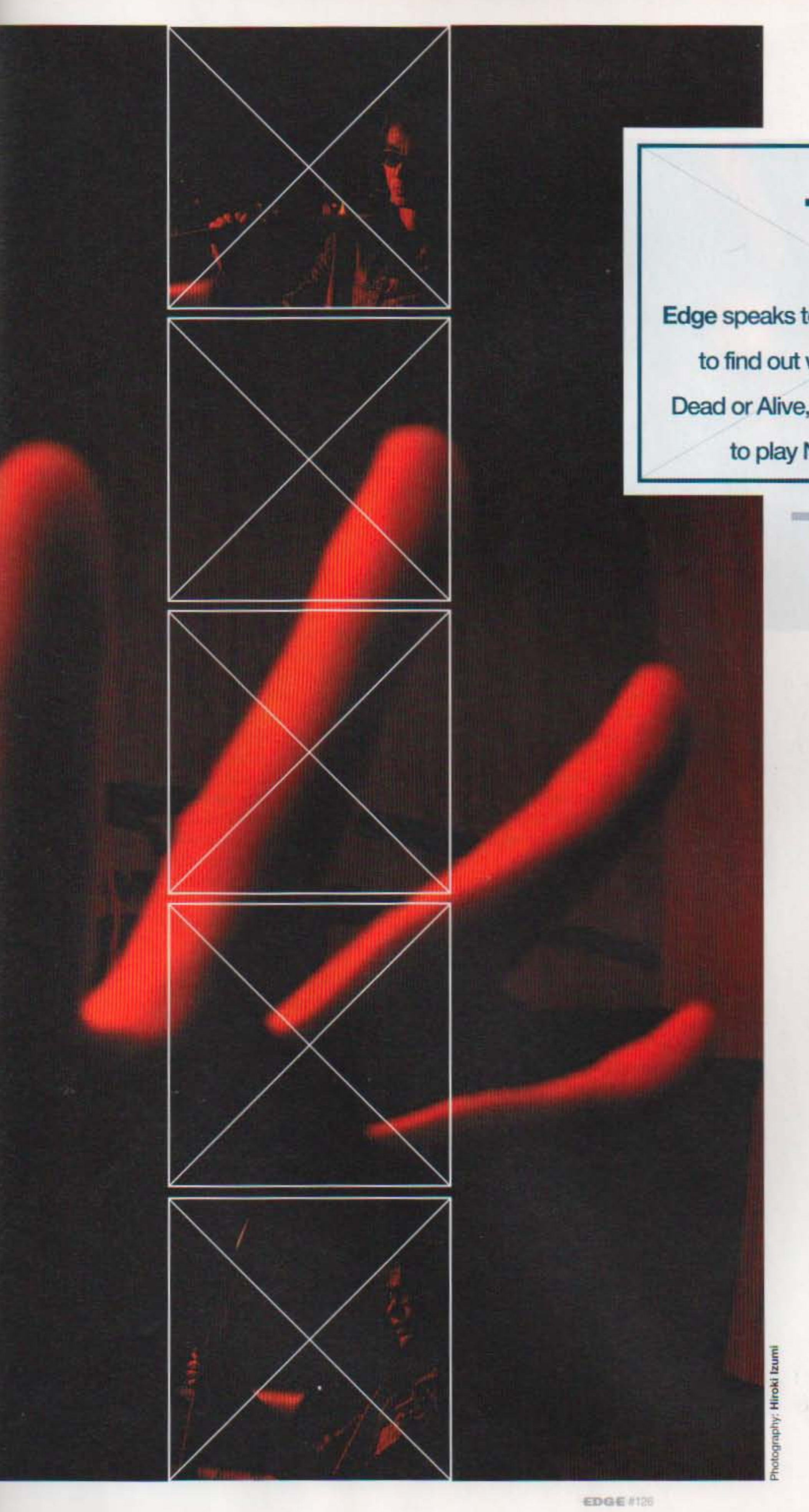
Format: PC
Publisher: TBC
Developer: Arvirago Entertainment





The creator of *Commandos* has set up on his own to work on this apparently hybrid bid to invigorate the traditional swords'n'sorcery RPG. It's certainly looking fairly pretty, if a tad generic





Photography: **Hiroki Izumi**

Inside...

Tecmo

Edge speaks to Tecmo's hardcore code commando, to find out what online connectivity will do for Dead or Alive, and why he refuses to allow gamers to play Ninja Gaiden before it's finished

Tecmo's **Tomonubu Itagaki** is a bit of a rarity. Not only is he one of the few Japanese developers to have wholeheartedly embraced the Xbox in spite of its continued commercial nadir; he's also unashamedly passionate about games. All too often, for a developer in his position, any passion or excitement is submerged beneath the stress of maintaining a commercially successful business, or is carefully concealed so as not to upset any other part of the industry's delicate web of interdependent components. So it's always refreshing to find someone who's willing to speak their mind without worrying about what their publishing partners, console manufacturers or any other part of the videogame value chain might think.

When **Edge** caught up with Team Ninja's head honcho to chat about *Ninja Gaiden* and the newly announced *Dead or Alive Online*, at the developer's HQ in Kudankita, Tokyo, it was the day before E3. Rather predictably, he was weary from the rush to get *Ninja Gaiden* ready for display at the show – this is, after all, the culmination of some five years in development. But he was also characteristically ebullient. Even after such a prolonged gestation, he's not prepared to rush *Gaiden* out before it's finished. Thus, after a brief demonstration of the *Gaiden* E3 demo, Itagaki-san kicks off our chat with a heartfelt tirade against releasing games according to spreadsheet checklists and the practice of releasing titles to meet deadlines imposed by the financial calendar.

"You make a game with passion," he insists. "You make it because you want to. But lately it seems you make a game because you want to finance another game you have in mind. Worse, many games are released unfinished. We really have to keep in mind the idea of making a game because you want to the people who play it to like it. Passion has to remain in the industry or I fear for it. This is a form of entertainment after all. I know this passion has left many developers so I really enjoy the time







"I admit I love machine power but I don't want to waste it," says Itagaki-san. "You need it to deliver your vision. That is why we went on Xbox while many were criticising it. It was vital to our needs. You can see the result with *DoA Online*; it's not just a lazy port, it's a new game"

we are able to spend on our projects like *Ninja Gaiden*. I mean this has been in development for five or six years now."

Even after such a long gestation, though, Itagaki-san is still reluctant to surrender control to gamers until he's confident that the game is finished. Hence his decision to demonstrate the game himself at E3, instead of providing a playable demo for the showfloor. And hence another impassioned outburst; this time about the practice of basing buying decisions on demos.

"I know there will be people disappointed not to be able to play the game yet," he explains. "But this is part of my policy about demos, which is close to that of Nintendo. I just don't think demos are necessary. If I were writing a book, would I be expected to create a demo for it? It would be like taking a short passage or even collecting a few passages in a little booklet. There is no meaning in this. Developers are so desperate to sell their games that they'll try anything to obtain a few extra sales.

"That is why starting with *DoA Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, I decided to release a game only when it is completed, without a playable demo. If people want to buy the game, they will. Which is okay for me; I'm quite confident in the quality of our creations. I believe the Team Ninja label represents quality because of our development philosophy. I would prefer people to buy the game and experience it quietly in their homes. I don't know how you can evaluate the quality of a game in the busy and noisy show floor in front of a small and low-quality demo pod."

Sentiments that **Edge** can sympathise with – not least because they are apparently borne of a compelling desire to give gamers as perfect an experience as it's possible to give them. But he's not finished, following up by rapidly seguing into the sort of fervent critique of lazy cross-platform releases that you're more likely to find on forums populated by disgruntled gamers. "We still believe we have not fully utilised the full power of Xbox," he starts, before pleading with **Edge**: "In fact, I want you to write this. I think it is important: multiplatform development is a lazy and disrespectful thing. If you develop a game on PS2, when you port it to other platforms it's easy to deliver higher resolution or anti-aliasing – these additions are hardly a big deal. Indeed, these 'improvements' aren't a result of the skill of the developer; it's just a result of greater machine power. But it's a sign of disrespect to GC and Xbox to just do the bare minimum, since they can deliver so much more – not to mention the disrespect shown to gamers. This has really upset me lately."

This is why Itagaki-san is so keen to stress that, although *DoA Online* is essentially a port of the first two games in the series, it will be comprehensively optimised for Xbox and, specifically, Xbox Live. The game is expected to be released this year in the US, with Japanese and European versions to follow in early 2004. "When we developed *DoA2* for PS2 and Dreamcast, we optimised them for the maximum power of each piece of hardware at that time. So this Xbox version of *DoA2* is a message from us to the rest of the industry to use the full machine power of every console. Even if this is *DoA2* on Xbox, don't be mistaken: this is a new fighting game, not a simple remake of the original."

Indeed it's this desire to work with the most powerful hardware that resulted in the team's original decision to develop for Xbox – the least commercially viable console in Japan then as now. But this decision, to invest in quality assuming that commercial success would follow, was vindicated by the substantial sales figures that followed the release of *Dead or Alive 3* – a consequence of the game's



Dead or Alive 2 has been comprehensively reworked for its inclusion as part of *DoA Online*, though the spirit of the series will apparently be maintained

Tomonobu Itagaki
producer

sublimely measured difficulty curve as much as of the team's hardcore coding skills.

With the next generation of console hardware still a couple of years away, Xbox Live gives Team Ninja another incentive to get the most out of Microsoft's hardware, and is one of the motivating factors behind the development of *DoA Online*. "The game stems from several concepts," clarifies Itagaki-san. "The first one is Xbox Live. I think it is a marvellous feature of Xbox. The ability to connect with other players and communicate in realtime is a new and enjoyable form of entertainment in videogames, but it has yet to be fully exploited. But the other thing that's great about Live is that Microsoft offers a very solid structure and technology you can count on, which frees you from various painful issues."

In addition, Itagaki-san sees Live as a spiritual successor to a coin-op sector that's slowly but surely stagnating. "The arcade sector is finished now. There is no market left. Some people might not want to acknowledge this, but I prefer to be realistic and I think the arcade is over. When we released *DoA3* without an arcade version we were told that no fighting game could succeed without the support of an arcade version. But compared to the competition, *DoA3*'s sales are largely superior to similar titles, like *Virtua Fighter 4* or *Tekken 4*. Our only regret was that it lacked that connection between users, as you get in the arcade. But there are probably only about 150,000 arcade gamers in Japan; on Xbox Live we can aim at 300,000 to 400,000 users worldwide. I know that not all of these will buy *DoA Online* but I'm pretty confident the game will boost the number of Xbox Live subscribers. So in fact, online gaming has the potential to be the new arcade. Fighting games will have to change to fit this new reality."

DoA Online is obviously positioned in a bid to do exactly that, and the balletic sensibility and easy accessibility of the series, coupled with its satisfying degree of depth certainly seems a good fit for an online environment.

Indeed *DoA Online* is not just another bid to flex coding muscle on cutting-edge hardware. It's also a testament to the pride that Tecmo takes in its work. "We put our whole spirit and love into our games," Itagaki-san affirms. "We are proud of our games so far, especially when it comes to the *DoA* series. Our first consumer title, *Dead or Alive*, on Sega's Saturn, has a special place in my heart. We put so much into it that we were not able to work for quite a time after its development was completed. It is a milestone for us and it was never released overseas. So this is





Although it's been recoded for Xbox, the original *Dead or Alive* will be kept intact for *DoA Online*. In its own way, though, it's still a beautiful and entertaining game







In spite of overlapping characters, *Ninja Gaiden* is not related to the *Dead or Alive* series. It still boasts all the hallmarks of a Team Ninja production, though, such as fluidity of control, technically and aesthetically groundbreaking visuals, and visceral action

FAQ

Company name: Tecmo
Founded: 1967
HQ: Tokyo
Number of employees: Over 600
Selected softography: *Fatal Frame (Project Zero), Dead or Alive series, Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball, Rygar, Ninja Gaiden, Monster Rancher*
Projects in development: *Ninja Gaiden, Dead or Alive Online, Dead or Alive 4*

another reason to include this version in the game on Xbox. We could have used an emulation program to run the game on Xbox, but we preferred to convert it totally for Xbox. Doing so, I had this strong impulse to increase the number of character polygons – going back to this game is sometimes hard because the graphics are clearly outdated. Hands are so basic for instance. But we decided to keep the game in its original form because, as I mentioned, this is a very special title to us."

While the original *Dead or Alive* will be kept intact, it's a different story for *Dead or Alive 2*, which will be comprehensively reworked for its Online incarnation. "We started the game again from scratch, keeping almost nothing from the original. After we developed *DoA2* on PlayStation2 we developed a new engine for *DoA3*, which was itself superseded by the engine we created for *DoA Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, which is the engine we're using for *DoA Online*. So basically, *DoA Online* is much more advanced than *DoA3*. I hope that doesn't upset the fans of the series." Itagaki-san is consequently also mulling over some fairly substantial tweaks to the game's mechanics and structure, as well as considering the technical difficulties of allowing PAL gamers to compete online against NTSC gamers.

One potential problem is that, with *Dead or Alive 4* concurrently in development, there's scope for ideas from one to spill over into the other, diluting the impact of both, though this is not something that apparently worries Itagaki-san. "This is not *DoA4* so we have to keep a line between these two titles. This has to remain *DoA2*. Fans of the game have to feel *DoA2*'s spirit. Our ideas for *DoA4* are very different from *DoA2*, so there is no crossover between the two. I want *DoA4* to further the evolution of the series. With *DoA2*, characters could jump from one room to another; with *DoA3* we increased the interaction with the background environment. With *DoA4*, I want more things to fly away, to explode everywhere. It is all about interactivity. This has become the evolutionary path for the series. *DoA2* offered a lot of dynamism and emotion that you feel watching your character interacting with this very natural environment. *DoA3*, brought that dynamism to a higher level. I hope that *DoA4* will take this to an even higher level but with a new idea that will bring some refreshment to the mix. I can't speak about this new concept yet but it should benefit from some of the experience we're gaining with Xbox Live on *DoA Online*."

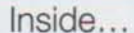
Dead or Alive 4 is still some way off. But, having seen *Ninja Gaiden* up and running, and given our admiration for the *Dead or Alive* series, **Edge** is looking forward to the release of *Ninja Gaiden* and *Dead or Alive Online* as much as Itagaki-san is. "I really would like to see *Ninja Gaiden* complete at last. I mean it is taking so much time. But we are now arriving at the result we were aiming for so this is satisfying. *DoA Online* is less demanding since we are starting with a complete idea; we know where we're going and how to get there. But with both titles, we are quite satisfied by the type of interactivity they offer. I hope users will feel the same way."





Although it's already been some five years in development, Team Ninja resolutely refuses to rush the release of *Ninja Gaiden*. Or even give out any in-game screenshots to the likes of **Edge**


KOEI



Inside…

Koei

Koei's come a long way since its creation. As the company prepares to expand overseas and online, Edge finds out how it got where it is now, and where it's going in the future…

Koei's rise to prominence appears to have been sudden and rapid. In the space of just a few years the company has transformed itself from a moderately successful, medium-sized publisher that specialised in historical simulation and wargames, to a company that is successfully competing with Japan's big-name publishers, producing an action series that almost routinely chalks up stratospheric sales figures. However, the outfit's apparently meteoric rise is in fact the culmination of a conservative, slowly-but-surely approach over the course of two and a half decades.

Now, though, it's getting to the point where, like other large Japanese publishers, Koei is finding the domestic market insufficient in scope to house its aspirations. Consequently, the company intends to expand internationally, which is good news given a first class softography that includes the likes of *Dynasty Warriors 4*, *Dynasty Tactics* and *Gitaroo Man*. But adapting the undoubtedly eastern aesthetic of the company's output and packaging it to achieve a level of western commercial success to match Koei's domestic performance represents a sizeable challenge.

If a single game has been responsible for the transformation in Koei's fortune, there's no doubt that *Dynasty Warriors 2*, released in its home territory as *Shin Sangokumusou*, is it. "This is a big title, which has had a major impact on our company," is how company president, **Kiyoshi Komatsu**, understates it. In spite of a depressed domestic market, that has seen companies such as Capcom and Sega suffer, the latest title in the series, *Shin Sangokumusou 3*, eclipsed a host of big-name franchises to sell a million copies in less than a week after its launch.

But, according to Komatsu-san, these figures aren't down to a big-budget marketing campaign. Koei isn't the sort of company that tends towards profligacy: "*Shin Sangokumusou* is a series in which we have not invested a lot

Photography: **Hiroki Izumi**





"I know that we have to maintain the core concept of the game but at the same time give gamers some originality. But as long as users are eager to play in Sangokushi's environment, I would like to keep making sequels," says Tomoike-san, acknowledging the difficulties of updating *Dynasty Warriors*



FAQ

Company name: Koei
Founded: 1978
HQ: Hiyoshi
Number of employees: 500
Selected softography: *Dynasty Warriors* series (*Shin Sangokumusou 1–3*), *Dynasty Tactics*, *Mystic Heroes*, *Gitaroo Man*, *G1 Jockey 3*, *Crimson Sea*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* series, *Kessen* series



Dynasty Tactics harks back to Koei's wargaming roots, featuring the same degree of historical accuracy that saw teachers recommending its earliest games to students

in promotion. When we released the first episode and we were preparing the second we did not build any big promotion campaign. The phenomenal success of the second episode comes mainly from user feedback. People started to tell their friends how much the game was fun to play. Our magazine and TV ad campaigns were nothing like what other companies are doing. So the million copies sold for *Shin Sangokumusou 2* is the result not of the marketing but of its core fun game experience."

The man responsible for that core experience is **Takazumi Tomoike**, the senior manager of Software Dept 4, a division created specifically to focus on action games. In some respects, the philosophy behind the *Shin Sangokumusou* series wasn't a radical departure for Koei. After all, the company's traditional strength is in crafting games that recreate the battlefields of historical Japan. "The game's core idea is of the traditional image of a hero standing in front of a large horde of enemy troops," explains Tomoike-san. "We call this cultural image 'Ikkitosen'. *Sangokumusou* is all about this cultural concept, which is nothing new at Koei."

But in almost every other respect, the team had to start from scratch. "We started from zero as the company lacked the necessary know-how for creating 3D models and putting them in motion. We spent so much time working out how to animate a single model. We spent over a year and a half just creating the engine, and usually we're only allowed to take one year to develop a game at Koei."

Nevertheless, in spite of the novelty of the series for Koei, it was more or less an instant hit in Japan. But the relative lack of success in overseas markets is rather perplexing. Particularly for a company that aims to expand internationally. Increasing numbers of Japanese publishers are beginning to find that the Japanese market is reaching a peak of maturity, and consequently overseas markets are becoming essential to offset development costs that continue to rise.

"People are saying that mobile phones are the biggest competitor to the game industry in Japan but I think it's just that the market is reaching completion," argues Komatsu-san. "But on the bright side, there are markets in which no game consoles have been officially released yet, such as South Korea, China, Taiwan, etc. These are big markets." Indeed Koei has considerable presence overseas already. "We sold 1m copies of *Shin Sangokumusou* overseas even with our strong Asian image," he continues. "Reaching the scale of 4m sales is a problem for us and we are still far from such a level. But we would like our games to be enjoyed by a wide audience, meaning not just only in Asia but also in North America or Europe. So we need to have this idea in mind when we are developing a game.

"How to appeal to overseas markets? To be honest, we need to add a foreign touch into games. Maybe we need to develop games overseas and release them for their local markets. For example, having US teams making games for the US market and the same for Europe. I would like to develop our image overseas to do this. I have a lot of hope for our foreign units; we are working with the Singapore government to train some of their young people, for example."

And, although the UK isn't, perhaps, as important a market as the rest of Asia and North America, Koei's CEO and co-founder, **Keiko Erikawa**, suggests that it may be a long-term goal for the company. "My dream is









Kou Shibusawa
producer

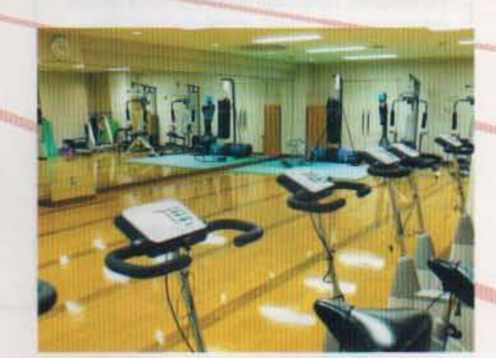






to make games with English partners in England. I love the country so much. I think there is a lot to be done. We have many ideas and would be delighted to find great partners. Great discovery, invention and culture were developed in England. Even now, this country is capable of creating so much culture such as the recent 'Harry Potter' books."

Still, adapting to new markets is a considerable task. Companies like Capcom and Konami have historically been successful because their videogames have borrowed liberally from Hollywood; Koei's titles are more distinctly Japanese – a fact acknowledged by **Kou Shibusawa**, Koei's founding producer. "We still need to be more appealing to overseas gamers. We need to find new themes to build on, beside Japan or China. This could be sci-fi or fantasy, even European history." His sentiments are shared by Tomoike-san. "I wanted to use the 'Star Wars' licence but we encountered difficulties. I know that it is hard to make *Shin Sangokumusou* a success in the US on the same scale as in Japan, but I'm confident it can be done using the same technology but applied to another world. I really would like overseas players to enjoy the same







Koei is in this for the long haul, as Erikawa-san attests, "The need to play will never disappear. It is a human instinct"



The *Kessen* series is another display of Koei's traditional wargaming strengths, though it's one of the few series that the company's managed to successfully export to overseas audiences in Europe and North America

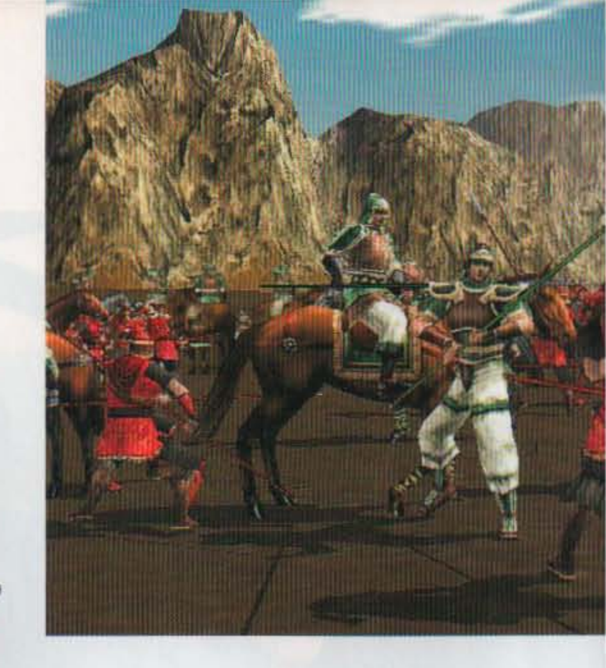
fun that Japanese gamers are already experiencing."

One of the problems is the scale of localisation required for the series. "First we had problems with the voice acting. Ancient Chinese chivalric speeches are hard to translate into English, for instance, as there is often no equivalent. So when we heard the first voice translation, we were surprised as the English version was completely different from what we were expecting. It was only then that we realised how very different our cultures are. I knew then we could not create a perfect localisation.

"This cultural difference is a real barrier. We made the game in order to let users enjoy the dramatic action of the Sangokushi wars. But the gameworld and even the names of characters are very alien in the west. Asian users have easier access to such content. And these cultural barriers have a direct impact on the story. With no solid knowledge of ancient China and the difficulties learning names, you can't follow the dialogue."

Another manifestation of these cultural differences is the simple variation in taste. "I have many things I would like to change or improve with more machine power," Tomoike-san continues. "For instance, I have this complaint from overseas about fog. I have been told about this issue so many times. In Japan, people are not very concerned about this. The game has been designed to focus on the action taking place in the nearby surroundings of the hero. To make a fog-free environment, I would have to decrease the number of enemies to a level where you would face only a very limited opposition in the battlefield.

"I want the game focused on action and especially in recreating the drama of the Sangokushi conflict. So from that perspective, fog is not my priority. But as many are still complaining about it, SCEA included, I would like to fix this with more power in order to offer an environment more realistic. This would strengthen the game concept and fun."



The international market isn't the only avenue for expansion though. Koei is also preparing itself to take advantage of the embryonic online gaming market. "We want to build a solid online business model with *Nobunaga Online*," explains Komatsu-san. "We hope this will be an important base for our future development in this field, and we hope this will help us to go further toward female users. These are our objectives this year."

Again, though, Koei is adopting a considered, realistic approach, and the company is clear about the limitations of the online gaming market. "I know that many are developing massively multiplayer online titles around the world," points out Tomoike-san. "The market is being flooded with these kinds of games. In the case of a standalone game you can aim at 1m copies in terms of sales. But in the case of online games it is another story. Players only play one or maybe two at a time, so however innovative your title, however enjoyable it might be, currently it's very difficult to sell as many copies as you would like to. Maybe such games aren't destined for great expansion after all, as their fundamental nature may be their own bottleneck."

Indeed if there's a constant quality that is apparent from talking to Koei's upper echelons,

Company history

The story of Koei's conception is a rather interesting one. The company was formed, in 1978, by a husband and wife team who are still with the company. Kou Shibusawa (a nom de guerre) explains, "I wanted a computer so much but had no money to afford one. My wife (**Keiko Erikawa**, now Koei's CEO) offered me one for my birthday which I then used to develop games, scientific programs, evaluation applications, management sims – all sorts of things. I spent all my nights on the computer. I remember that there was a famous expression at that time: 'computer widow'. Well that was our situation at home."

This image of a family cottage industry is confirmed by the fact that Erikawa herself produced the labels, packaging and adverts for Koei's first few titles. "Koei was then the very first company to make simulation games," she explains. "But we were still limited in resources and making two games at the same time was impossible. We made an economy simulation, a management game: *Top Management*. Several major Japanese companies were studying how to make a simulation in order to help them in their management and initiated a programme for ¥3bn (£15m). When they learned that a company named Koei had already made an incredible game about company management, they came to us and commissioned us. Ultimately, though, selling the simulation to a wider public was a better choice for business, so we went from developing business applications toward pure gaming." Eventually, due to Shibusawa-san's interest in history, that pure gaming came to be represented largely by historically authentic wargames – which had unexpected consequences. "Teachers were recommending our games to their students. It was then known that if you play Koei's games, your knowledge of history would increase. In school tests, students were maybe not very good at maths or science but when it came to history they were unbeatable. *Nobunaga No Yabo* was a hit."

Nobunaga's Ambition 1



Winning Post 6



Angelique 3



Daikokai Jidai 4





it's this reserved approach to risk-taking. It's not a company that's characterised by rash business decisions. "When we do something, we plan it over a long time – a very long time," explains Erikawa-san. "To open our Chinese branch we planned it ten years ago. You need around 20 years to get everything in place and up running. Really!

"I know that people are speaking about China as the factory of the world. They are all excited right now about the Chinese market but I had this idea long ago. Now I have my attention on India. So I plan to have a branch in this country in 20 years' time from now. I believe this is going to be great market and to prepare this I'm working with Singapore with an office over there." Which, in an industry that itself is barely 25 years old and all too frequently typified by companies chasing short-term profit, is an astonishingly farsighted view.

And it's one that seemingly pervades every level of the company. "Other publishers rely mainly on charismatic producers," argues Komatsu-san. "One will suddenly have a big hit and the company will sell a lot of units, but apart from this one hit title you will often see that the other games produced by such publishers are not that successful. I admire the man who came out with the idea of *Dance Dance Revolution*. I also find the person who invented *Taiko No Tatsujin* at Namco admirable. These kinds of games would have made it easier for a wide audience to accept Koei's image. But to do such things, you need crazy creators. They are needed in any company. People are impressed by the company's producers. Koei moves differently and doesn't focus too much on its team but more on a precise process of research, trial and development.

"In other companies, you find producers who do what they want and spend the money accordingly. At Koei, it is completely different. I think it is important in the current sluggish state of the industry. Every day, you hear bad news even from the most famous names in publishing. I feel this is very dangerous given the rising prominence of companies like EA in Japan, since Japanese publishers are getting in a worse situation every day."

Indeed, in spite of the recent spate of merger announcements that reflect this worsening situation, Koei is adamant that its business strategy will ensure its survival. "Our profitability rate is very high. We create good content which produces great sales. I don't see how a company could solve one of its core problems by simply merging with another company. I only see more problems and destabilisation as a result. I really believe that people are fleeing from some of their responsibilities, hoping that in a merger, the other company will solve their problems. In a merger, you use an incredible amount of energy. I don't know if this is useful."

This conservative strategy is hardly glamorous, and it's unlikely to win the approval of ardent gamers. But the focus on producing fewer games in a bid to reduce the impact of the traditionally hit-driven business model of the videogame industry has ensured the company's survival. And it's an approach that's produced joyous results. Even the most cursory glance at the company's software roster reveals a selection of titles that are, above all, a pleasure to play – and wide ranging too, from the likes of *Dynasty Warriors* and *Crimson Sea* to *Gitaroo Man* and *G1 Jockey*.

Komatsu-san outlines the company's strategy for the next 12 months, "We need to develop the *Kessen* franchise further. We also have to support and develop our online game. But, yes, we need to create new franchises in addition to the ones we've already successfully developed. This is our main goal this year." But the company isn't about to renounce the hard graft that is responsible for its current level of achievement, "The success of *Shin Sangokumuso* hasn't come easily; it is the result of years in development, meeting various challenges and hardships. This is the long, hard process we need to go through to get the big titles of tomorrow."

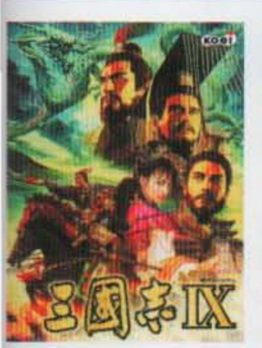






Gitaroo Man, _Mystic Heroes_ and _Crimson Sea_ attest to the strength in depth of the company's release schedules, and bode well for its planned expansion overseas and online

Romance of the Three Kingdoms 9



Pacific Theater of Operations 4



Nobunaga's Ambition – Sotenroku



Dynasty Warriors 4



Haruka Naru Toki No Naka De 2



Romance of the Three Kingdoms



The Modern Age

Mods have graduated from Internet servers to being an integrated part of publishers' marketing strategies and shop shelves worldwide. But where do they go next?

The Modern Age. In terms of the PC, the title rings true, even if you ignore the pun. The revolution and popularisation of mods that started with *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom* reached what could be considered maturity in the years following the release of the first *Half-Life*, that game's lifespan expanded to meet its five-years-later sequel by a string of superlative user-created experiences. Disappointment-tinged reviews of *Quake III*, while often nonplussed with the actual content of the game proper, insisted it was worth buying for the support it would inevitably receive from the mod community. *Neverwinter Nights* went one further, with the campaign more of a demonstration of what you could do with the highly developed toolset rather than the central reason for purchasing. Retail releases of game mods sit side by side with 'real' releases on the shop shelves and the teams that created them are being employed en masse.

It's even starting to affect game magazines' strategies. "Having a large mod to covermount is definitely comparable – in terms of one mag's commercial advantage over its competitors – to a new playable demo," notes 'PC Gamer's senior editor **Matthew Pierce**. "Of course it ultimately depends on the quality of the mod (and demo you're comparing it to), but the first chance to play an expansion of an existing title is a very compelling reason to pick up any mag."



"Mod culture is now an accepted part of the industry, and a game failing to release its development tools is more worthy of comment in a review than a game that does"



While it would be perhaps over generous to argue that naked *Dead or Alive* skins are a work of satire, the reaction of developers means this patch exposes as much hypocrisy as naked flesh



Mod culture is now an accepted part of the industry, an a game failing to release its development tools is more worthy of comment in a review than a game that does. User-created content has won its war for acceptance. Since seemingly everyone, on the PC at least, has accepte its wisdom, the question now is what happens next. Mods won their war. Can they keep their peace?

Spreading the pool

One of the first changes in the current situation are the afte effects of everyone releasing their tools – namely there bein a surfeit of riches for interested parties to use. Is this going spread the pool of talented modders too thin? "The numbe would suggest so," argues **Lee Bamber** of Dark Basic. "If ten tools where shared between 500 end users, you would have 50 users per tool and the start of a viable community that could share ideas and build on the knowledge of other The community would reveal and nurture this talent for gam design. Now consider 100 tools shared between 500 end users and you have only five people using that tool. Not much community help, no feedback and no opportunity to show off your talents."

Mods rarely exist out of context of a community offering feedback and encouragement, as well as sharing knowled of what works and what doesn't in the temperamental software, and if the proliferating number of communities

Photography: Martin Thompson

The freedom of the modding world means that all games, from the realism of *Day of Defeat* or *Battlefield 1942* to the Day-glo *Buzzybots*, are possible

reduces each of their sizes, the results could be catastrophic.

Not everyone holds such a negative view. **Charlie Cleveland**, programmer and designer on recent *Half-Life*-powered mod hit *Natural Selection*, argues the contrary position. "I say the more the better," he states. "Serious mod development is moving increasingly outside the FPS genre, and many games have to release their tools for this to happen. Even competition within the same genre is good, as it means the tools and company incentives – such as mod expos and mod contests with cash prizes – will continue to improve. As more games and game genres support it, more modders appear, and more mods are created."

While clearly only a limited number of gamers will ever want to dabble in the creative process, it's a fair assumption that not all the possible candidates are already doing it.

So, what does happen when gamers make games? Are these people actively courted by developers and publishers, and is this tiny community likely to grow? "Although the number of games featuring mod tools is increasing, I think a significant amount of talent will stay concentrated around a few core games," notes GMax tool specialist **Chris Cookson**. "Trying to nail down the criteria for these particular 'core' games is difficult, but a combination of commercial success, cutting edge technology and capable editing tools is likely to feature highly."

It should also be noted that while the commercial rewards for a developer whose game's mod community produces the next *Counter-Strike* are considerable, releasing a software development kit for a game isn't without its expenditure. When asked about whether Ion Storm would be releasing the tools for its forthcoming *Deus Ex II*, project lead **Harvey Smith** answered: "We're still thinking about that. That was popular with the first game – but it was popular with 500 people. It took a ton of money and time, and a lot of time." The dev budget and human manpower thrown at releasing the tools for a community that doesn't flower is essentially wasted. And even if a minor community does blossom, without a *Counter-Strike* it doesn't exactly sell games. And which communities are the ones that flower? "I think it has more to do with how many people buy and play your game. If you're a mass, mass hit, then something like that can add," notes Smith. *Deus Ex* is one of the top-50-selling PC games ever in the UK. If it isn't big enough to develop a community, then what hope does anything smaller have? While other games may release their mod tools, if only the top few produce mods that gather greater public attention, increasingly we may see teams deciding to reallocate their budgets into more definitively rewarding areas.

Others have used short cuts. Many toolsets are simply the same developer tools repackaged with little thought given to the end user. For the uninitiated modder it's a significant barrier, particularly as documentation is often scant. Mod snobs might argue that this is the very thing that drives the community, encouraging sharing and oneupmanship. Take Looking Glass's *Thief*, which released its notoriously unfriendly editor with a minimum of instructive materials and resulted in user-created content as good as that of the original game's, if not better.

Putting aside the admirable fanaticism of the *Thief* community, why did *Deus Ex* produce so little and the lesser-selling *Thief* create such riches? Perhaps the difference is in the core nature of the game. Making a *Deus Ex* level requires huge efforts across several skillsets – narrative, level construction, NPC work and so on. "Creating a singleplayer *Deus Ex* mod presents several unique challenges," agrees **Steve Tack** of the *Deus Ex* mod *Zodiac*. "You need to create a surprising amount of character dialogue and other text elements that work together to tie a story together in a coherent manner and flows from one mission to the next." In comparison, with *Thief* if you create a room, a lightsource, and some guards you create a mini-level which you can play





In the next generation of games, the level of detail in models will prove to be a sticking point. Will freeware tools like Milkshape offer enough to cope?

in a way that compares, if only vaguely, with the mother game. The same obviously holds true with more shooting-orientated games. But for poor, maximalist *Deus Ex*, the box-room with a guard bears no relation to the game proper. It's fair to say the more effort it takes to create any kind of reward from the toolset, the less chance of reaching the critical mass required to create something of critical worth.

Gathering an audience

While it's the big multiplayer mods that attract the attention, an interesting trend is that they're also the mods that most often fail to gather an audience. "It's easier to create a successful singleplayer mod as opposed to a multiplayer mod," argues **Neil Manke** of Black Widow Games and designer on successful *Half-Life* mod *They Hunger*. "The main ingredients for a successful singleplayer mod are a high-quality storyline, impressive visuals, well-planned gameflow, original challenges, and other elements that can be implemented with the right talents and proper effort."

Multiplayer mods are relatively unpredictable. "It seems to me extremely difficult to judge how exactly a multiplayer game should be designed so that it will strike the right chords and appeal to a lot of people," Manke continues. "Even professional game development companies rarely succeed in creating a multiplayer game that even slightly approaches [*Counter-Strike*'s] popularity."

Even if a singleplayer game is popular, it doesn't mean that it's as likely to reach the stage of commercial exploitation. "It's highly unlikely that players who have played the free version will have any interest in buying it later," argues Manke.

"The original Deus Ex levels has about 400 visible polygons at any time; in the sequel, 40,000 will be shown. This is a huge increase in workload and possibly marks the end of the lone-wolf modder"

"That's the reason why *Gunman* had to be released as a commercial product only. In the future, we will probably see the best singleplayer mods having to choose either free or commercial distribution."

"Also of note is the fact that multiplayer mods can and are frequently updated and improved, whereas singleplayer mods have to be the finished product at time of release," agrees fellow Black Widow designer/coder **Einar Saukas**. "This means there is a much smaller time window where a singleplayer mod may have commercial viability."

If a developer releases a kit, it's almost certainly purely the level designer alongside with various importing tools. One weakness, especially required in total conversions, is in producing original art and, especially, in-game models. Free Internet tools such as Milkshape have been fine for the last generation but for forthcoming games the detail required is considerably beyond what freeware applications can comfortably replicate. "There's always been this gaping hole for mod artists where they need to use a particular graphics application to export their models to the game engine," notes Cookson. "Unfortunately, such 3D apps tend to cost somewhere in the region of £2,000 upwards putting them out of reach of many users. Gmax and tools like it finally give mod developers industry-standard tools for free, although limited to exporting content to certain licensed games only, and at a cost to the game developer. The benefit is that games can be shipped with an almost complete set of tools for mod development, on a par with those used by the professionals."

The massive increase in detail is going to cause a lag in development. "I can see considerable interest in user-created maps for games such as *Doom III*, but user-created characters are likely to be thin on the ground while mod authors get to grips with the new tools," continues Cookson, "Authoring bump maps by hand is not particularly easy without good preview tools, and creating them using high-polygon models requires a very different skillset to the low-polygon work most mod artists are currently used to. It will be interesting to see how long it takes for the first *Doom III*/*Deus Ex II* custom characters to appear on Polycount.com in comparison to new maps. My money's on the maps simply due to the fact the full editing toolsets will be available for creating them."

While the tools may exist, this doesn't mean that they're possible to handle for smaller teams. To take a random example, the original *Deus Ex* levels had around 400 visible polygons at any time. In the sequel, 40,000 will be shown on screen. This is a *huge* increase in the workload of any individual, and possibly marks the end of the lone-wolf modder. **Erik Johnson**, project manager at Valve, thinks



MOD CRIB NOTES



ALIENS
For *Doom*, this challenging total conversion was an early and highly successful proponent of the other-media-based mod, with the entirety of the game's structure altered to star the Geiger-designed aliens. Also highly notable for its stealth-based play years ahead of the rest of the industry.



CAPTURE-THE-FLAG
Quake caught the multiplayer masses, but it took the *Capture the Flag* mod to help push the popularity. An application of this mod seems almost standard edition for anyone releasing a modern multiplayer game. Unfortunately, most miss the games' notorious grappling hooks.



TEAM FORTRESS
Initially appearing on *Quake*, this introduced the option for players to select character classes on each side, with hugely varying powers. While team members had previously been hired, the purchasing of a mod wholesale, as Valve did here, was a sign of things to come.



COUNTER-STRIKE
Counter-Strike's success was unprecedented, but based on the application of its core rules. A simple concept – terrorists versus counter-terrorists – and a structure that rewarded patience, cunning and – occasionally – camping beyond the call of duty. At its height, was being played by more than the rest of the shooting games online combined. Also purchased by Valve.

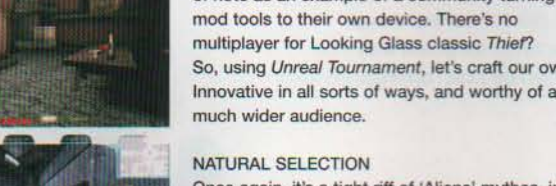


GUNMAN CHRONICLES
Not actually a mod; it just started as one. This future cowboy-themed game started off being designed as a singleplayer mod, but was picked up and given a development budget to take to release. While hardly the greatest firstperson game of the period, an important development.



THIEVERY
By far the least popular mod at the list, *Thievery*'s of note as an example of a community turning mod tools to their own device. There's no multiplayer for Looking Glass classic *Thief*? So, using *Unreal Tournament*, let's craft our own. Innovative in all sorts of ways, and worthy of a much wider audience.





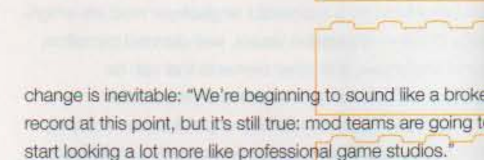
NATURAL SELECTION
Once again, it's a tight riff of 'Aliens' mythos, in an action-strategy context. Aliens evolve up their pathways. Humans construct weapons. Acclaimed on release for *Half-Life* in 2002 and downloaded over a million times, this is testament to how a mod can extend a game's longevity.







DESERT COMBAT
As Gulf War II kicked off, the *Battlefield 1942* community set about busily recreating it with this freshly released alpha-version mod. It takes certain liberties with the war – namely that the Iraqi side has comparable equipment and can fight back. Reportedly currently in discussion with a publisher about a proper release, too.



change is inevitable: "We're beginning to sound like a broke record at this point, but it's still true: mod teams are going t start looking a lot more like professional game studios."

"The scenario is similar to the evolution of studios from the lone game programmer," **Lee Bamber** agrees, noting it parallel nature to the rest of an industry. "The amount of content you need these days for a single level means you need an army of people to help out. The lone-wolf mod developers can still find a place for themselves; however th are at a significant disadvantage when pitched against a te doing the same thing, much like the games industry itself."

Perhaps, however, this is passing stage. With the increasing graphical density, developers will start to work o more efficient ways of generating content rather than the manual and painstaking brick-by-brick approach. "It seems like Crytek's *Far Cry* level editor is a good example of this – whole island populated with beaches, rivers, foliage and suchlike can be created from scratch in a few seconds," notes Cookson. "Trying to reproduce an equivalent island i UnrealEd would be a much more arduous task."

Shifting from visual flair to content

Some companies are moving the emphasis of creation awa from mere visual flair and on to content. The sharpest proponent of this approach is BioWare, with its *Neverwinte Nights*. "I do think developers will need to make the decisio very early on if they wish to include a toolset in a game, as should be given a tremendous amount of development tim for the expressed purpose of making it easier for the end user," notes **Jay Watamaniuk**, BioWare's community manager. "The point of a toolset is to draw in more people, not to scare them off with immense complexity. The modde

"It's not all PCs. The other great unknown in the future of mod development is the sacrosanct bodies of consoles, where user-created content is beginning to make its fledgling appearance"

will always hack through even the most complicated of systems to create their own stuff, but the general public will demand simplicity." *Neverwinter* remains one of the venues where a solo modder can bring an auteur's vision into being.

Mods have clearly paid off for BioWare, with over 2,500 extra modules available to download from its vault, an immediate added bonus to any purchasers of the game. How Valve has profited from its mod community is undeniable – but still extraordinary. Even now, a few scant months before the release of the sequel proper, the retail version of *Half-Life* mod 'Day of Defeat' is debuting on sale. However, while this is clearly good for these individual game publishers and the team, through extra sales, and the gamers themselves, through extending their play experience, is this extreme longevity actually good for the industry as a whole? If someone's playing just one game for such an extended period, this is clearly drawing away from the time they could be spending on playing – and, more relevantly for the industry, purchasing – new games.

Unsurprisingly, Valve and BioWare don't consider it a problem. "Making our games more accessible for mod makers is something that our customers clearly appreciate in the end," responds Johnson. "There aren't any other factors that play into our decision-making process."

"Mods are good business," says Watamaniuk. "As a developer we need to sell games to pay people's salaries so anything that will promote a game to increase sales is a good thing." And, of course, there's always the tempting pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. "There is always the chance that some community mod team will come up with a way to play a game that was never intended but ramps up interest in a whole new way," continues Watamaniuk playfully. "I think everyone has heard of *Counter-Strike*, eh?"

With such possible great rewards coming from a successful mod scene around a game, any influence of the wider picture is clearly going to be minimal.

The console mod scene

But it's not all PCs. The other great unknown in the future of mod development is the sacrosanct bodies of consoles, where user-created content is beginning to make its first fledgling appearances. The level editor included in *TimeSplitters* and extended in its sequel brought level editing into the living room for the first time, in this generation at least. However, it's hard to believe that anything larger than tokenism will ever appear through this method – for those attracted to the full freedom of mods, the opportunities of the PC are genuinely overwhelming. Especially, as now, you can bring this autonomy back to consoles.

This has particularly flourished on the Xbox modding





Marble Madness 2003 **takes arcade pleasures as its inspiration and prays lawyers don't notice.** ***Scientist Hunt*** **takes chainsaws as its cue, and hopes that 'The Daily Mail' does**

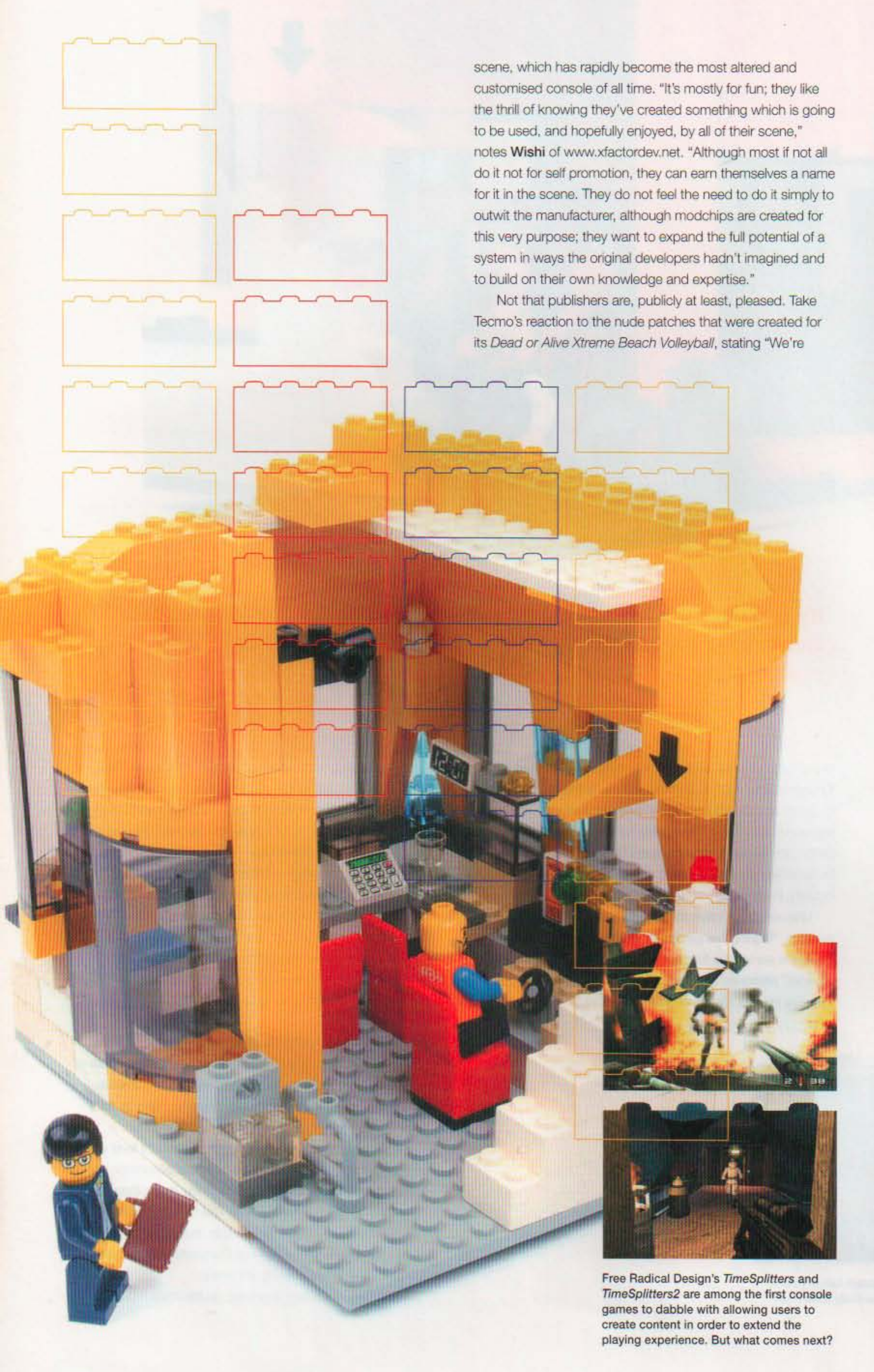
scene, which has rapidly become the most altered and customised console of all time. "It's mostly for fun; they like the thrill of knowing they've created something which is going to be used, and hopefully enjoyed, by all of their scene," notes **Wishi** of www.xfactordev.net. "Although most if not all do it not for self promotion, they can earn themselves a name for it in the scene. They do not feel the need to do it simply to outwit the manufacturer, although modchips are created for this very purpose; they want to expand the full potential of a system in ways the original developers hadn't imagined and to build on their own knowledge and expertise."

Not that publishers are, publicly at least, pleased. Take Tecmo's reaction to the nude patches that were created for its *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, stating "We're watching you very closely! Please do not post things that infringe copyrights and other legal issues" on its Website. "I'm sure the developers are just as interested to see what people do with their game as the users are, although obviously this wouldn't be the view we get from their PR companies," notes Wishi sardonically. "Obviously, the big money earners in the company want to prevent changes to their game, especially if they give extra features to the users for free. In the case of *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, I'm sure the main reason that Tecmo wants it to stop is so that it does not become associated with dirtying its company image."

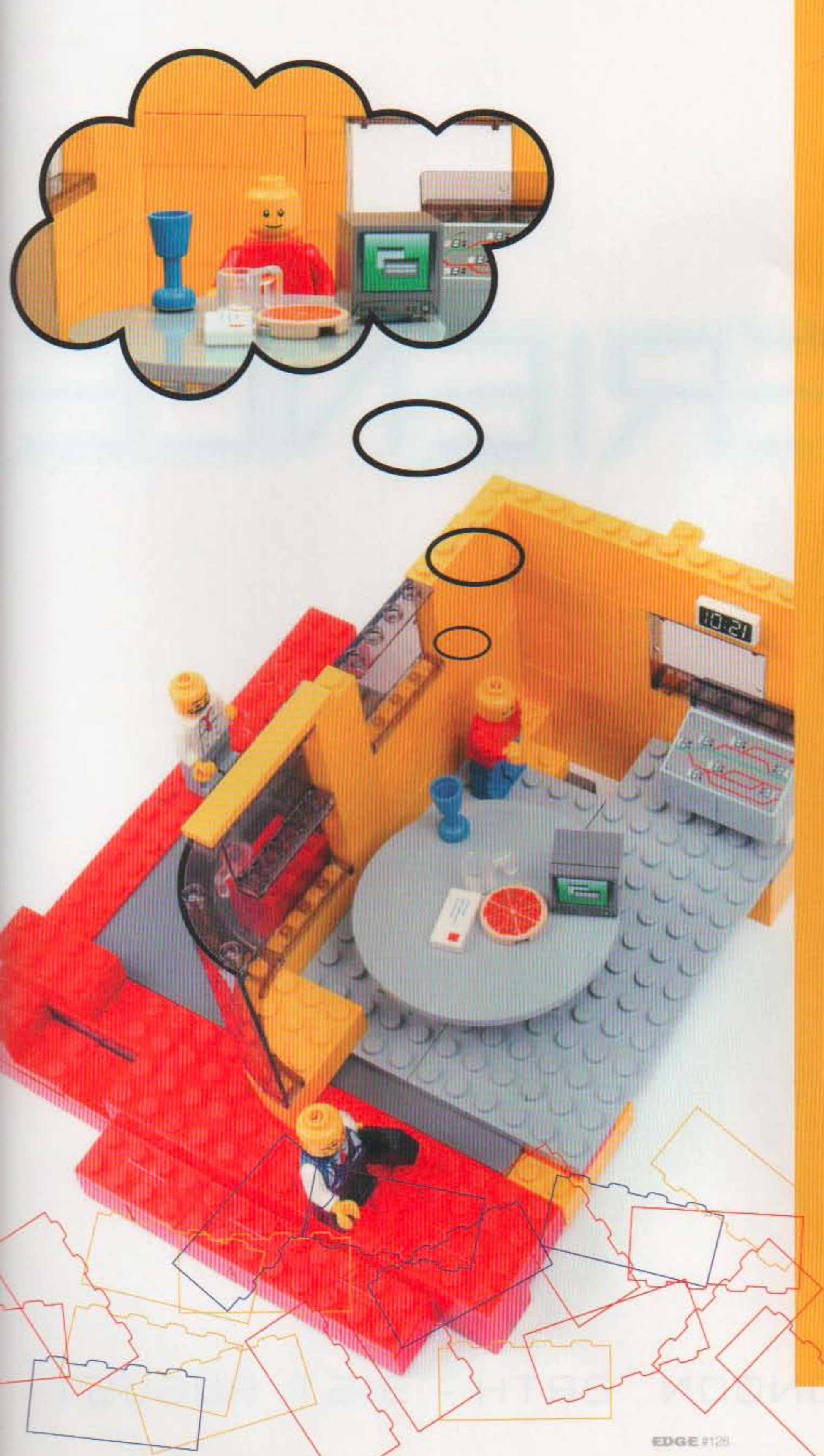
Modding of this sort, being unsanctioned, can only really operate in direct proportion to how much a company chooses to guard its hardware. "I think we may see some changes in the system architecture in order to increase security, especially in the next generation of Xboxes," notes Wishi. While primarily to stop piracy, this will also strongly and negatively impact the console modding community.

While in the current generation of consoles, it's fair to expect more stories similar to the modder's pointed critique of Tecmo's marketing hypocrisy, if you're generous, or a coder's barely suppressed desire to add nipples to everything in the world completely if you're not, it's also true to say that the possibilities for this sort of action will decline. The potential for modding on consoles is only ever relative to the security a company chooses to impose. In the next generation, with a different stringency of security systems, expect the amount of activity to wane. A shame, but hardly surprising.

Which leaves the future of user-created content, in a form greater than a limited feature in a single game, very much in the hands of PCs. And despite the challenges modding has to face, with the degree of acceptance it's engendered, it still possesses the possibility of becoming the equivalent of an art scene or small-film group. There's still some way to go. "I think it will continue to increase as publishers, press and the gaming public grow out of the bias that creating mods is in some way intrinsically less valuable then creating games," speculates Cleveland. "It's like saying that an *Unreal*-engine-based game isn't a full game. I view this very much like the change that TV has made recently. I used to think that if something was on TV, it couldn't be as artistically meaningful as a movie, merely because of the medium. Now that we've seen quality productions like 'The Sopranos', 'Six Feet Under', and 'Queer as Folk', it's painfully obvious that TV can indeed compete with movies, and due to their longer episodic format, can exceed them in some ways." Mods, essentially, are about giving the world freedom to do whatever they want with a developer's precious game. In a very real way, mod's future is whatever mod makers choose to make it.



Free Radical Design's *TimeSplitters* and *TimeSplitters2* are among the first console games to dabble with allowing users to create content in order to extend the playing experience. But what comes next?



A brief history of mods

The problem that faces anyone who attempts to write a history on something as intrinsically chaotic as mods is exactly where to start it. To do so requires creating a working definition of what a mod actually is. If you choose to start at the point where mods are made possible by the release of the design tools, you immediately remove the possibility of discussing unsanctioned modifications. But if you include unsanctioned modifications you immediately push the start point to a nameless fiddler altering a line in a commercially released piece of software for the simple of pleasure of seeing what it does. Remember those lines of BASIC you entered to have extra lives on the Spectrum? That's a mod by any reasonable definition of the term.

Perhaps that's the point – modding is very much based in the urge to deconstruct and alter an existent system for the joy of it, and has almost certainly existed as long as there's been videogames. In a recognisable form, you can at least go back to 1982 and the original *Castle Wolfenstein* of the Apple II. A popular total conversion was constructed, which swapped all the in-game characters and text for assets which related to a popular children's television show of the period. *Castle Smurfenstein* proved a typical irreverent start to the phenomenon known as modding.

Mods as known to the modern gamer blossomed along with the two early-'90s technologies that popularised the PC shareware scene, namely PCs which at last could create three-dimensional worlds, and wider access to the Internet. The first allowed the PC game to at last be accessible to an audience uninterested in all things two-dimensional and icon-based and the latter provided it with a conduit to be accessible *through*. First *Wolfenstein* and then *Doom* flickered around misappropriated work and university PCs – and shortly after, mods for them.

Id encouraged this action, simply asking that any of this extra user-created content require a full version of *Doom* to be used, rather than the freely distributed shareware version. Perhaps surprisingly, most modders seemed to stick to this restriction, and it showed the start of the mutually beneficial relationship between mod culture and mod-savvy developers. *Final Doom*, for example, released in 1996, was a compilation of some of the best of the user-created content, with a cut of the profits being given to the creators. The trend of repackaging mod content for a mass audience started at this point, and continues to this day in the form of mods-turned-games like *Counter-Strike* and *Day of Defeat*.

Quake's release opened up the third dimension for mod culture, but at a cost. Initially the level-design tools weren't released, and proved cumbersome when they actually did appear. Enter an array of user-created level-editing tools, of which Worldcraft proved the most popular. From this came the first array of *Quake* multiplayer mods, including early successes like *Capture the Flag* and *Team Fortress*.

From there it's just a short step to *Counter-Strike* and the modern age.



Photography: Martin Thompson

Canned games

Game development is a tricky business. The wake of every success is littered with those projects that never made it, but remain, in the minds of their development teams at least, the greatest games never played. So in a spirit of nostalgia, Edge looks back and wonders, "What if?"

The cancellation of promising games is a fact of life for developers. In one sense, this survival of the fittest provides the experience needed for the industry to grow its art. Most of the highly acclaimed games of the recent past stared down the barrel of oblivion at certain points in their development, relying on resolve, grit and, on occasion, sheer good luck to make it to completion and eventual glory; think *Half-Life*, *Halo*, *Unreal*, *The Sims*, *The Getaway*, *Metroid Prime*...

The downside, of course, is that occasionally the filter is too fine. Innovation is lost along the way, sometimes to be rediscovered in a future project, but often to be lost forever. For unlike other media in which an author might, at worse, suffer from writer's block, or a film director have trouble making the final cut, nothing gets close to the travails of completing a game. A heady mix of interactive creativity and cutting-edge technology working in complete harmony, the videogame is a very fragile creature during development. Will the plot gel? Will the complex pathfinding AI actually work? Will the game engine run at more than five frames per second, even on the new 'it's-so-powerful-it-needs-to-be-supercooled' PC graphics cards? As always, the bottomline remains, "this process is costing X hundred thousand per month, will it make us any money at the end?"

And this is the main reason for the cancellation of games, particularly in these financially unstable times. Games are expensive so there's always pressure to save money by making fewer of them. Equally any time a publisher or developer is taken over, its most adventurous, and therefore risky, games are immediately canned.

One of the saddest cases of complete extinction was US developer Cavedog, which had three highly original, if troubled, games in development, when owner GT Interactive found itself in deep financial trouble and was bought by voracious French publisher Infogrames. Shooter *Amen*, episodic freeform online experience *Elysium* and the mysterious *Good & Evil* all bit the dust. More recently, cashflow problems at Interplay/Virgin saw the end of RPG *Torn*, shooter *Falcone: Into the Maelstrom* and wacky natural strategy title *Rubu Tribe*.

Even when publishers and developers are financially stable, however, games still get canned. According to **Mike Gamble**, THQ's director of European Product Development, there are two legitimate reasons for a publisher to cancel a game. One is a material breach of the contract, which occurs if the developer fails to hit its scheduled milestones on a consistent basis. The other criteria, non-marketability, is less clear cut though. "Potentially a publisher could use it as a get-out-of-jail-free card but used honestly it's an assessment of the product's place in the market," Gamble says, emphasising the importance that a high profile plays in ensuring even a technically complete game's release.

And with the marketing budgets for triple-A games often double the size of the development budget, a lack of marketability, rather than technical failure, has been the biggest killer of innovative games in recent years. One company currently struggling with this problem is ZedTwo. It's been working on an innovative title called *Pillage*. Originally signed to UK publisher Rage, the game's future was initially put in jeopardy by the publisher's slow decline. But after getting the rights back and self-funding development, ZedTwo now finds itself running up against another obstacle. "Most product acquisition guys love the game, but publishers' marketing departments don't seem to know how to handle it," says ZedTwo's managing director **Ste Pickford**. "It's a pattern we've seen repeating itself throughout the industry."

"I've looked at *Pillage* a couple of time," admits Gamble. "It's a great concept and good fun to play but it's very much a gamers' game. Once you've played it, you

understand it, but it's hard to communicate how it works to the massmarket. We've had internal discussions at THQ about how we would try to position *Pillage* but in the end we didn't sign it." Nevertheless, since ZedTwo's recent acquisition by larger UK developer Warthog, Pickford remains confident the game will find a home, and won't end up on the next list of greatest games never played.

The growing casual nature of the game-playing market means developers must match their technical and gameplay prowess with some canny spindoctory, but the obvious solution, buying in licences, isn't always a success either. Despite shelling out for the privilege of developing games for various of the 'Austin Powers' films, neither Take 2 nor Acclaim managed to release a branded game that didn't involve pinball.

Another infamous example concerns US-publisher Sierra, now part of Vivendi Universal. It caused howls of protest from the fanboys when it canned its *Babylon 5* game in 1999. The company has also spent almost a decade trying to develop a massively multiplayer online game based on its licence to the works of Tolkein, while other high-profile casualties closer to home include SCi's *Thunderbirds* and Acclaim's *Ferrari 360 Challenge*.

The cost of the licence for the publisher is clearly the main reason for failure in these cases, although that rarely helps the developer when the game is shut down. "If an original project is canned, what usually happens is, if the developer resells it to another publisher, the original publisher gets its advance back. With licensed products, however, the developer has nothing to sell on," explains Gamble.

But even in the case of an original game, cancellation typically has big financial implications for developers. Often they go bust or get bought by larger concerns, and that's why many developers retain a certain hostility to those who wielded the axe. On rare occasions, they even get some sort of revenge.

"I was at ECTS just after Infogrames had canned our game," recalls one developer, who shall remain nameless for obvious reasons. "Running down between the two halls at breakneck speed in a hurry to meet someone, who should I charge into? None other than Bruno Bonnell. His bag went flying, papers everywhere, I was just about to apologise when I noticed who my victim was. Needless to say I didn't lend a hand."



Internal Affairs

developer: Attention To Detail
platform: PC
development lifespan: 2000–2001

why it would have been great:
Designed as a 12-mission character-based driving and action game, *Internal Affairs* would have been extended with downloadable monthly episodes via broadband. Each episode would have revealed a new area of Phoenix City island and a new part of the plot, which initially concerned tracking down a terrorist cell.

why it was canned:
Started as a self-funded internal project by the team behind *Rollcage* and *Ducati*, *Internal Affairs'* future relied on finding a strong publishing partner to fund the ambitious development. "We had two successive publishing opportunities," recalls **Chris Gibbs**, ATD's managing director. "One fell through due to the publisher folding, the next when the subsequent publisher was acquired." Without publisher support and with the broadband part of the game in doubt due to the slow penetration of services, ATD couldn't wait any longer to secure a third deal, and took a paying commission instead.

what happened next:
Internal Affairs is unlikely to be resurrected, although ATD hopes to employ some of the design concepts in future projects.



Indestructibles

developer: Bullfrog
platform: PC
development lifespan: 1995–1999

why it would have been great:
Inspired by Peter Molyneux's vague remarks about a concept known as My Incredible Superhero Team (MIST), *Indestructibles* would have been a game in which players could have designed their own superhero, following either a path of good or evil. Another aspect was to have been interaction with an urban environment with the characters using their various super senses to complete missions created on the fly by a virtual gamesmaster.

why it was canned:
Indestructibles was never going to be an easy project to complete, conceived as it was as EA took over Bullfrog. Another problem according to programmer **Glenn Corpes** was a lack of a clear design goal. "*Indestructibles* meant a lot of things to a lot of different people," he recalls. "As well as me 'leading' the project there were designers and producers on the team and we all bought into different bits of it." Unsurprisingly internal support at EA was equally patchy. The game was eventually reduced to a four-man prototyping team. "It wasn't canned as such, rather put on hold because EA wanted to keep the cool engine and multiplayer technology," Corpes says. The end finally came as that team left Bullfrog to form startup developer Lost Toys.

what happened next:
Lost Toys went on to release *Moho*, *Battle Engine Aquila* and is now working with Geoff Crammond on *Stunt Car Racer Pro* – not a superhero in sight.



SkyHammer

developer: Rebellion
platform: Jaguar
development lifespan: 1994–1995

why it would have been great:
Mixing intense flying and shooting around 'Blade Runner'-esque city, *SkyHammer* would have been one of the first 3D console games. It also featured texture-mapped enemies.

why it was canned:
SkyHammer wasn't officially canned according to Rebellion co-founder **Jason Kingsley**. "It was finished and delivered but Atari went and did whatever Atari did," he explains. Developed for the Jaguar, which even at that stage was a moribund system, Atari's financially precarious position meant that *SkyHammer* was never actually released as it had stopped supporting the system.

what happened next:
Happily, *SkyHammer* was finally released by Jaguar fanbase publisher Songbird Productions in 2000.





Perfect 10

developer: Rage Birmingham
platform: PlayStation2
development lifespan: 2001–2002

why it would have been great:
Billed as pulling birds in a *Crazy Taxi*-style beachside town, *Perfect 10* would have seen the staid Japanese dating game meeting 'American Pie'. Players had to pull girls, each of who were rated out of ten, and then take them on dates. Better clothes, car, look and driving skill all improved the players' chances of dating the top-rated girl in the game, 'Perfect 10'.

why it was canned:
Given the green light in November 2001, *Perfect 10* was hit by the slow disintegration of the Rage empire. The Birmingham studio was then bought out by ex-Rage director **Trevor Williams** and renamed Swordfish Studios. "When we acquired the Birmingham studio, Rage was unwilling to release the intellectual property," Williams remarks, adding, "The game was fairly original too, so we were concerned about trying to re-invent it and sadly had to drop it."

what happened next:
Nothing. "We would love to use some of the babe models for example, but as we don't own the game rights, we can't," says Williams.



Inertia (aka Full Auto)

developer: Pseudo Interactive
platform: PC
development lifespan: 1997–1999

why it would have been great:
Car wars with kick-ass physics and rendering was *Inertia*'s selling point. It also would have featured technical innovations such as dynamic lighting and shadows, inverse kinematic animation for characters.

why it was canned:
David Wu, Pseudo's president explains the decision to can *Inertia* cryptically as a "conspiracy involving Satan, the Microsoft Xbox, Saddam Hussein and Senator Lieberman." Industry rumour suggests, however, that *Inertia*'s producer at Microsoft left the company. Without an internal advocate, the game was finally canned by senior management in 1999 because of concerns that it was 'too consoley' for a PC release.

what happened next:
A good portion of the *Inertia* engine made it into Xbox launch title *Cel Damage*, which was also dropped by Microsoft before finally being published by EA. *Inertia* has also served as the foundation for the forthcoming *Vectorman*, while the original music from the game (for those who are interested) is still available at www.silvershard.com/artists/radio.html

Neck some beers!



HMS Carnage

developer: Tribe (Ocean)
platform: PC
development lifespan: 1994–1997

why it would have been great:
Imagine the British Empire taking over Mars in the future but using Victorian-era technology. That was the goal of *HMS Carnage*, a flying and driving game peppered with references to cricket and stiff upper lips. It would have also featured over 45 minutes of FMV, mixing live action characters with CG backgrounds.

why it was canned:
It cost over £1m just to set up *HMS Carnage*'s art department with the SGI renderfarm it needed for the FMV. The project's scale caused problems in terms of bringing a coherent vision to the game. "Our brief was to go away and develop an epic game; four years later we were still doing it," recalls designer **Nigel Kershaw**. Trying to implement a 3D engine proved problematic as well. "It was just when DirectX was released," Kershaw says. "After we had sorted that out, Voodoo graphics cards came out, then it was Intel's MMX. We were always rewriting the engine." The final nail in the coffin came when Infogrames bought Ocean. Its management took one look at the sprawling project and shut it down. "We were definitely naive when we started but with a kick up the arse, I think we could have done it," Kershaw reckons.

what happened next:
Ocean was scaled down, becoming Infogrames Sheffield. Most of the *Carnage* team left soon after. Key members now work for Black Cactus, Brain in a Jar and Team 17, among others.

Call of the Dragonfly

developer: Lost Boys
platform: Xbox
development lifespan: 1999–2000

why it would have been great:
A thirdperson action adventure, *Call of the Dragonfly* would have used the then emerging realistic physics technology, creating an character who relied on psychic abilities, such as telekinesis, mind-reading or turning enemies blind, not firepower to get the job done.

why it was canned:
"We pitched it to virtually every publisher on the planet, but they either felt it wasn't going to work, or they dismissed it because it was too quirky. The lack of a focus on guns seemed to bother some of them as well," explains **Martin de Ronde**, Lost Boys' commercial director. Also, due to various reasons, the demo only contained one psychic ability. "In all honesty, it was probably difficult for publishers to imagine how the other abilities were going to work," de Ronde concedes. To compound matters, being a startup developer meant Lost Boys didn't have a track record of finishing games either.

what happened next:
Lost Toys is currently working on a new FPS concept for Sony. But de Ronde also points out that Microsoft's *Psychonauts* and Midway's *ESPionage* are exploring a similar game mechanic to *Call of the Dragonfly*.



Stampede!
developer: IO Productions
platform: Dreamcast, PC
development lifespan: 1998–1999

why it would have been great:
Stampede! was set to be the greatest herding game ever. Set in various 3D environments, it followed the exploits of the flat-capped Farmer Blow and his trusty dog Shep, as they travelled the world tidying up different animal groupings. One particular innovation was the sound, with each animal species being assigned an instrument and a melody, which would be interactively mixed and panned depending on the animals' position in the environment.

why it was canned:
Signed by Infogrames, *Stampede!* was victim to the endless internal reshuffling that went on within Infogrames at the time. Initially handled by the I-Innovation label, it didn't seem to fit into any of the replacement I-Action, I-Motion or I-Heroes brands. IO's **Glenn Broadway** also admits some technical problems. "The plan was for the player to control the farmer directly and to command the dog. This turned out to be one of the trickiest aspects of the game and one which hadn't been entirely ironed out when the death bell tolled," he says. "We tested dozens of different control methods, and even toyed with a 'whistle' input method using Dreamcast's microphone peripheral."

what happened next:
IO Productions became IOMO and dropped out of console development. It is now a leading developer of mobile phone games.



Arena
developer: Stainless
platform: PC
development lifespan: 1998–1999

why it would have been great:
Having previously developed *Carmageddon*, Stainless' next gore-ridden target was to have been Roman gladiatorial combat. Using realistic physics, *Arena*'s unique selling point would have been the way it allowed the player to control the movements of their onscreen warrior by directly manipulating their muscles rather than pressing buttons to generate end results.

why it was canned:
"We were well on the way to finishing this incredible system but we never really answered the question of the gameplay," muses Stainless' CEO **Patrick Buckland**. Another problem with the advanced physics system was that *Arena* would only run on high-end PCs, which has never been a big market for beat 'em up-style games. "Experimenting with the full-physics characters was fantastic. Honestly, we weren't doing it just for geek-value, but I guess at the end of the day the project disappeared up its own very technically-able backside," Buckland laughs.

what happened next:
"The dream hasn't gone away," Buckland enthuses. "You'll see the world's best rag-doll physics in forthcoming Stainless games pretty soon, and we've got some even grander plans for the future."



Warcraft Adventures: Lord of the Clans
developer: Blizzard/Animation Magic
platform: PC
development lifespan: 1997–1999

why it would have been great:
A singleplayer, point-and-click adventure based in the 'Warcraft' universe, key features of *Warcraft Adventures* were to include a rich storyline, character interaction and extensive exploration, backed by 40,000 frames of feature-film calibre animation.

why it was canned:
One fundamental problem was the dislocation of the Russian-based Animation Magic art team from the design team at Blizzard's Irvine HQ. The game progressed to an almost completely playable state at the start of 1998 however. Re-evaluation at this point resulted in a major design overhaul but before it could be incorporated, LucasArts raised the technical level of the point-and-click adventure by announcing the 3D *Grim Fandango*. "Given the game's status and the rapidly changing technology of the industry, we determined that it would not be possible to complete development of the title within a reasonable time frame," Blizzard explained in its cancellation press release.

what happened next:
Blizzard went on to develop the multi-million-selling *StarCraft* and *Warcraft III*. The backstory to *Warcraft Adventures* was eventually released in several fiction books.



Take the Bullet

developer: Red Lemon
platform: Dreamcast
development lifespan: 1998–2000

why it would have been great:
An interesting twist on the FPS genre, *Take the Bullet* placed the player in the role of the leader of a presidential bodyguard squad, combining action, tactical gameplay and an apocalyptic plot in equal measure. The obvious cinematic potential of the game was enhanced by its setting in 1960s America and rendering techniques which would have emulated film stock.

why it was canned:
A so-called 1.5 party game for Sega, developer Red Lemon suffered from all the usual problems of working on a new platform. "When we started development, Dreamcast was still called Katana," explains Red Lemon founder **Andy Campbell**. "We struggled with the evolutionary process of the hardware." Another problem that emerged was management. "The majority of the team was great, but we failed to manage a few well and they failed to deliver," he says. The resulting slippage to the schedule meant that by the time the game was back on track, Dreamcast was on its last legs. "Sega took the right decision to cease development. It was more misfortune than anything else," Campbell reckons.

what happened next:
The rights to the game returned to Red Lemon, which tried to rework the game for PlayStation2. The company subsequently went bust, however, with Dundee-based developer Visual Science buying the IP, although it's not currently working on the project.



Exo

developer: Particle Systems
platform: PlayStation2
development lifespan: 1999–2002

why it would have been great:
Halo for PlayStation2 with the art style of western manga, was the high concept for Particle Systems' squad-based FPS (**E**98's cover game). Set in a huge futuristic city, in which robotic warriors have gone haywire, *Exo* would also have highlighted Particle's cutting-edge high dynamic range lighting techniques.

why it was canned:
"To begin with we found the PlayStation2 difficult to get to grips with," says project leader **Glyn Williams**. "The second rewrite of our engine was still only doing about 15 frames per second." Such technical obstacles obviously had an impact on the game's scheduling. Unfortunately, the resultant slippage was combined with a move at publisher Infogrames towards less risky licence-based games. It dropped the project. "We kept developing it in the hope we could persuade them to re-sign," Williams reveals, which explains why the game, when finally canned, was in quite an advanced stage.

what happened next:
Particle Systems was bought by Argonaut in 2002. Now known as Argonaut Sheffield, it's currently working on a new version of its classic futuristic racer, *Powerdrome*.



Amen: The Awakening

developer: Cavedog
platform: PC
development lifespan: 1997–2000

why it would have been great:
A story-based FPS set in huge levels, *Amen* was to be an apocalyptic action game, which relied on realistic physics modelling. One infamous example was the ability to smash a window and use a shard of the broken glass as a weapon.

why it was canned:
Developed from Ottawa, separate from Cavedog HQ, the *Amen* team was left to its own devices for much of the development. While it struggled to get its ambitious game engine working, a lack of communication or scheduling allowed the implementation of the game design to slowly slip. An emergency meeting in 1999 saw a scaledown of the game in the hope this would get it finished but production was effectively shut down when six designers were laid off in November. Cavedog announced its cancellation in January 2000.

what happened next:
The canning of *Amen* effectively signalled the end of Cavedog. Six months later, the entire studio was closed down.



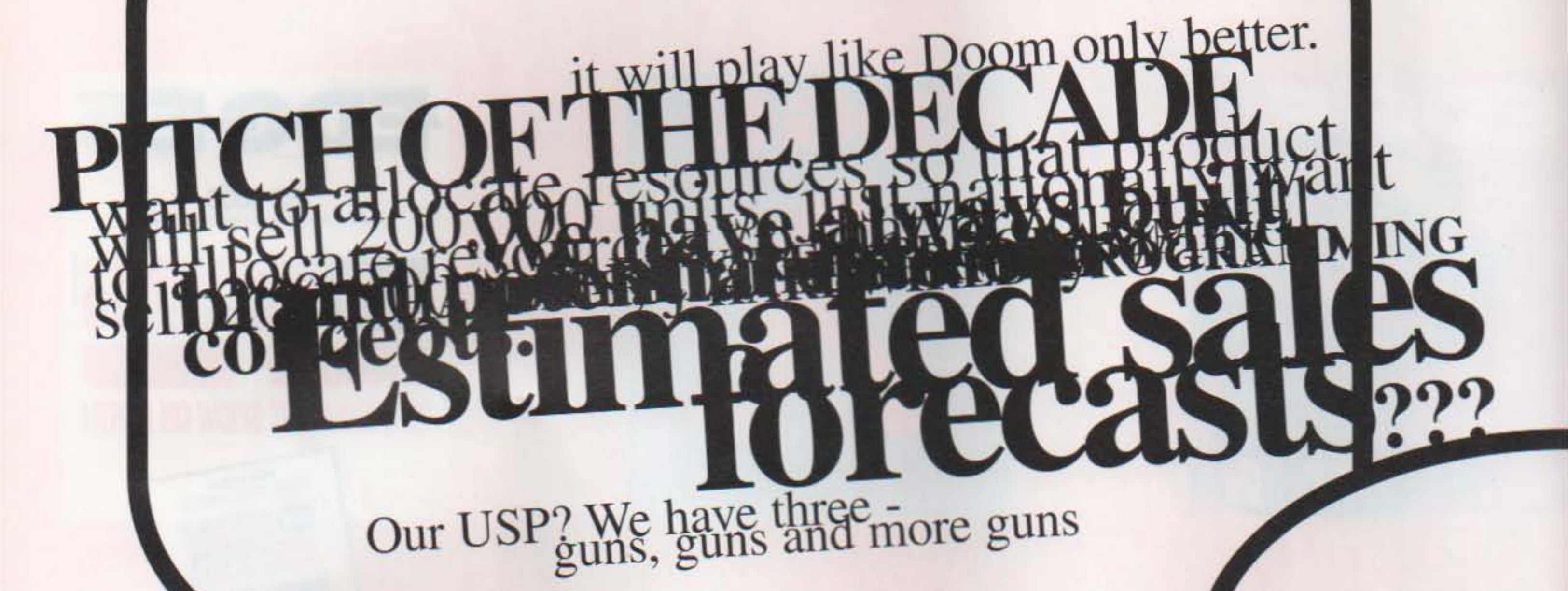
Prey

developer: 3D Realms
platform: PC
development lifespan: 1995–1998

why it would have been great:
A dark futuristic FPS from the creators of *Duke Nukem*, *Prey* was to use an advance[d] 3D-accelerated engine, feature singleplaye[r] and multiplayer modes and come with a realtime level editor.

why it was canned:
Like many 3D Realms projects, *Prey's* development was tortuous. Most of the initial production team had left the company by 1996, with a new team trying to nail down the engine technology. Content and plot only started arriving in 1997, but it was clear that things weren't going well when the new designer and lead programmer then left. 3D Realms' president **George Broussard** commented, "We felt a change was needed." Another attempt was made to get the technology back on track, but *Prey* finally ran out of steam during 1998. At the time, it was never officially cancelled but years later Broussard explained its demise saying, "*Prey* slowly fell apart because the tech team failed to get the engine out of the development phase and into production."

what happened next:
3D Realms continues to struggle with scheduling – *Duke Nukem Forever* has now been in development for over six years.



it will play like Doom only better.
PITCH OF THE DECADE
Estimated sales forecasts???
Our USP? We have three - guns, guns and more guns
That's the worst pitch i'v heard since Pengui Raiders of Arl

Indecent proposal

Every game starts with an idea. But the idea goes nowhere unless the team behind it can first make a successful pitch to a publisher. In the first of a series of features focusing on the game development process, Edge gets stuck in at the beginning...

April 1996, and the UK executive staff of international publisher MicroProse is meeting to discuss promising new product submissions. Only a few proposals have survived a brutal selection process. The external developer of one of the proposals has prepared a demo, a design document, a project plan, cost forecasts – everything its 'champion', an external producer at MicroProse, needs to present the game to visiting CEO **Steve Race**.

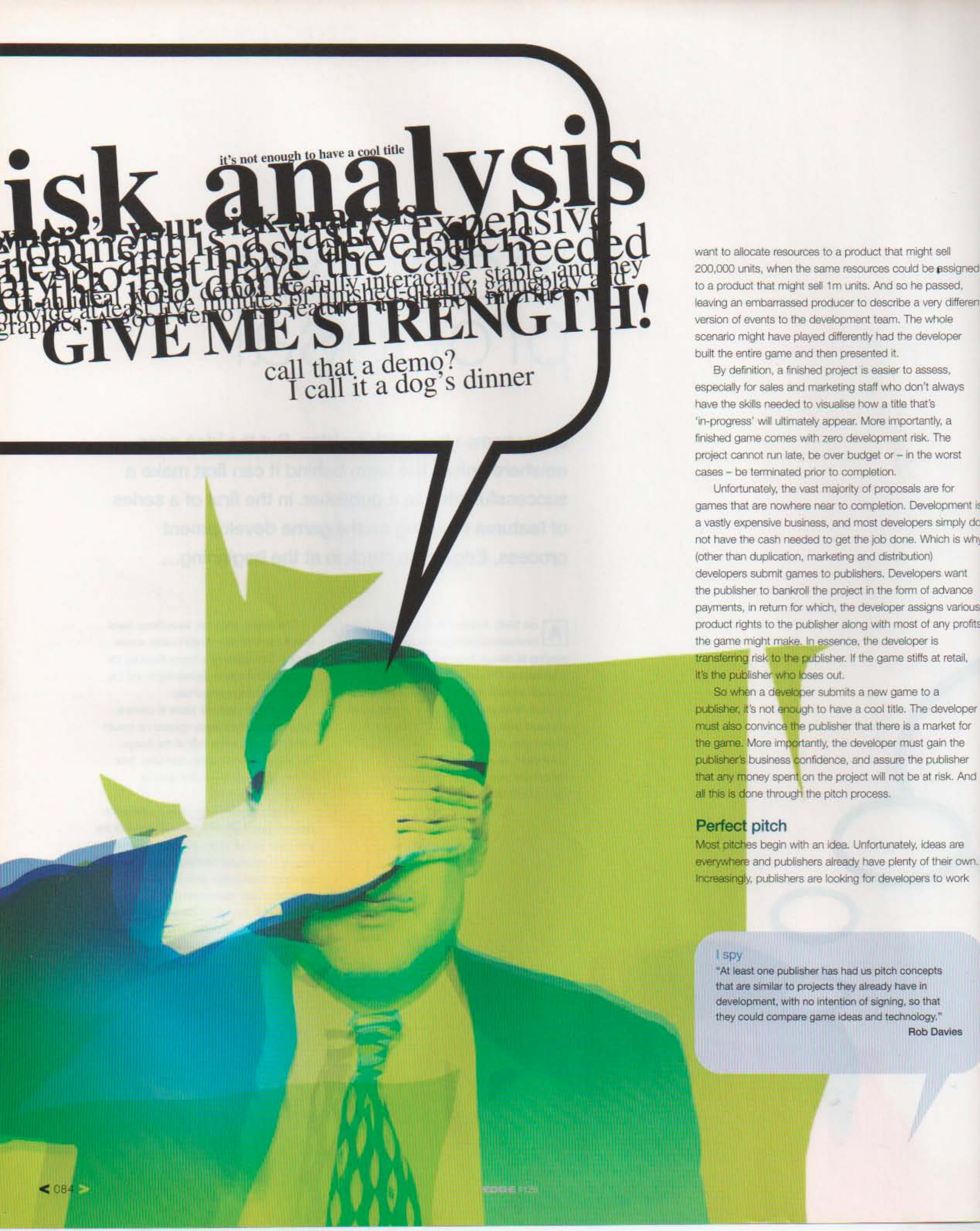
The omens are good. MicroProse Sales says it can shift over 200,000 units across Europe. Development is happy because it's worked with the team before and found the developers reliable and cheap.

At last, the producer starts to present the game. But he's barely opened his mouth when Race takes one look at the design document, tosses it aside, and says, "Not interested." Welcome to the world of videogame publishing.

Any discussion of the project submission process must start with the realisation that the sole raison d'être of any publisher is to make money. A developer pitching a new project to a publisher is essentially promising a higher rate of return on any cash invested in the project by the publisher, than if the publisher had simply left the money in the bank to accrue interest.

Race rejected the proposal because it lacked international sales potential. He did not





want to allocate resources to a product that might sell 200,000 units, when the same resources could be assigned to a product that might sell 1m units. And so he passed, leaving an embarrassed producer to describe a very differen version of events to the development team. The whole scenario might have played differently had the developer built the entire game and then presented it.

By definition, a finished project is easier to assess, especially for sales and marketing staff who don't always have the skills needed to visualise how a title that's 'in-progress' will ultimately appear. More importantly, a finished game comes with zero development risk. The project cannot run late, be over budget or – in the worst cases – be terminated prior to completion.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of proposals are for games that are nowhere near to completion. Development is a vastly expensive business, and most developers simply do not have the cash needed to get the job done. Which is why (other than duplication, marketing and distribution) developers submit games to publishers. Developers want the publisher to bankroll the project in the form of advance payments, in return for which, the developer assigns various product rights to the publisher along with most of any profits the game might make. In essence, the developer is transferring risk to the publisher. If the game stiffs at retail, it's the publisher who loses out.

So when a developer submits a new game to a publisher, it's not enough to have a cool title. The developer must also convince the publisher that there is a market for the game. More importantly, the developer must gain the publisher's business confidence, and assure the publisher that any money spent on the project will not be at risk. And all this is done through the pitch process.

Perfect pitch

Most pitches begin with an idea. Unfortunately, ideas are everywhere and publishers already have plenty of their own. Increasingly, publishers are looking for developers to work

I spy

"At least one publisher has had us pitch concepts that are similar to projects they already have in development, with no intention of signing, so that they could compare game ideas and technology."

Rob Davies

First impressions

"One team sent us a promising demo. But when we visited them, we saw the staff using masses of pirate software, and downloading porn all day. Turns out it took them six months to build what should have been a two-month demo. So we blew them out." **Anon publisher**

on the publishers' own brands. As **Mike Gamble**, director of European product development for THQ International, says, "If we get a pitch that does not suit our current needs but the developer impresses us, we will approach them with our own intellectual property." Which makes perfect sense when publishers such as LucasArts and EA control megaton franchises such as 'Star Wars', 'Harry Potter' and EA Sports.

Furthermore, the industry is shrinking. Although total revenues are higher than ever, the move to a high-cost/high-risk publishing paradigm has resulted in the current hit-driven climate in which companies are frequently merging or going out of business. "Presenting new products," explains **Rob Davies**, director at respected developer Hothouse Creations, "was much easier in the mid-'90s due to the relative financial wealth of publishers, many of whom were raising funds via the stockmarkets, and who had aggressive expansion plans. Now, many of them are going through well-documented financial woes. But as production values on games increase, so do the budgets needed, and so publishers are being more cautious."

The hit factory

No company more than EA exemplifies a publishing model that is perhaps best described as, gambling a big stack of chips on one hand of blackjack. The trick is to win more money from your hits (*The Sims*) than you lose on your failures (EA.com). But hits are hits only in hindsight. Despite the lengths developers must go through to convince publishers their new game will be a best-seller, the reality is that most publishers themselves often don't know which of their original titles will be successful.

So before a developer even starts work on its magnum opus, the odds are stacked against the game being published. However, opportunities for new titles do exist. **Dean Trotman**, acquisitions manager for Codemasters, is quite clear. "We're always interested in seeing original new titles. We rely on talented external teams to join us in achieving our targets and share in the commercial success that follows. And we're well aware that the best results are achieved if we buy into a development team's own concept."

Developers agree that publishers are happy to receive new game proposals, if only not to miss out on that one-in-a-million submission. "Every publisher will talk to any experienced developer," comments Davies, "Just in case we have the next *GTA*. But in reality, several publishers don't have the money or the necessary publishing slots available."

For many publishers, trawling for hits is at the heart of the product submission process. Smaller publishers, however, spend less money on titles, so can do business on lower sales. Any published title has a chance of becoming a hit – *Tomb Raider* transformed Eidos' standing overnight – but even if a game is not a hit, it could be a steady earner, and might help improve the developer's long-term reputation.

And so we come back to the pitch; the point where art and commerce, fun and hard work, hopefully mesh in the form of a publishing deal.

Able demonstration

The exact nature of each pitch varies, but most follow a general pattern in that an initial game idea is fleshed out to provide a clear vision of the finished product, along with a compelling business case for publishing it. And this is achieved through the preparation of a demo and one or more documents. Here, quality of execution is everything. The demo, in particular, is the most crucial component of any pre-production package.

In an ideal world, demos are fully interactive, stable, and they provide at least five minutes of finished-quality gameplay and graphics. A good demo also features a polished interface, and runs on actual code rather than temporary hardwired programming. The perfect demo also tackles some of the game's most difficult technical aspects, and is designed for easy pick-up-and-play, without tricky running procedures, and without subjecting users to paranoid security measures.

"If we get a pitch that does not suit our current needs but the developer impresses us, we will approach them with our own intellectual property"

In the real world, demos are often surprisingly shoddy. Some are non-interactive, some are plagued with bugs, and many are actually technology demos with no gameplay. As one unnamed producer laments, "One guy came to me with the worst looking Visual Basic app you can imagine. It was a football management game, and the guy's sole hook was that the football players in the game had one more stat than the footballers in *Champ Manager*. Nightmare."

Another common problem with demos for original videogames is that they're simply not original. The same producer remembers, "One E3, I had to sit through racing game after fucking racing game. By lunchtime I wanted to slit my wrists."

Critical mess

The problem here is that many developers are insufficiently self-critical from the outset. A team may have every reason to feel proud of its new racer, but is the title really going to compete for punters' cash with *Gran Turismo*? "Many developers make the mistake of not looking at the current market for their type of title," says Gamble, "It's no use working away in a closed room. Titles need to be relevant to consumer demand."

The value of a strong demo can't be underestimated – ex-developer Rage built an entire company on the back of its demo for *Incoming*. But while a good demo covers much of the creative side of the pitch, the developer must also provide documentation to deal with the business side.

A good submission package includes a design outline, a project plan, a cost forecast and an at-a-glance project summary. Some submissions also include a technical design document, a style guide and a risk analysis. Which is a long way from when in 1989, as veteran Britsoft developer **Ed Grabowski** remembers, "You could do a deal over the phone and contracts fitted on a single page."

"One guy came to me with a football management game, and the guy's sole hook was that the football players in the game had one more stat than the footballers in Champ Manager. Nightmare"

Design documents vary in format. Some are huge multi-volume epics specifying every minute detail. Few publishers will want to see so much information initially, but they will take comfort from the fact it exists. Trotman agrees, "A common mistake among developers is to send a wealth of detail right at the start. For Codemasters, a playable demo and a design overview is an excellent starting point to gauge team and project potential. If we are interested, we will then ask for more material."

A more frequent problem with designs, however, is that many of them read like badly written synopses for amateur science-fiction novels, ending with a scan of a joypad and the line, "It plays just like *Doom*, only better." Other telltale signs of poor design are documents that promise an impossible number of new features, documents that are high on hyperbole – "innovative AI, awesome graphics" – and low on gameplay information, and documents that list USPs that are not unique.

A good design outline highlights in concise terms what the game is, what makes it fun, and what creatively differentiates the game from the competition. A good design shows that the designer understands the complexities of game development and of the market place. Most importantly, a good design tacitly recognises that a publisher will be interested in a game only if the game contains strong intellectual property.

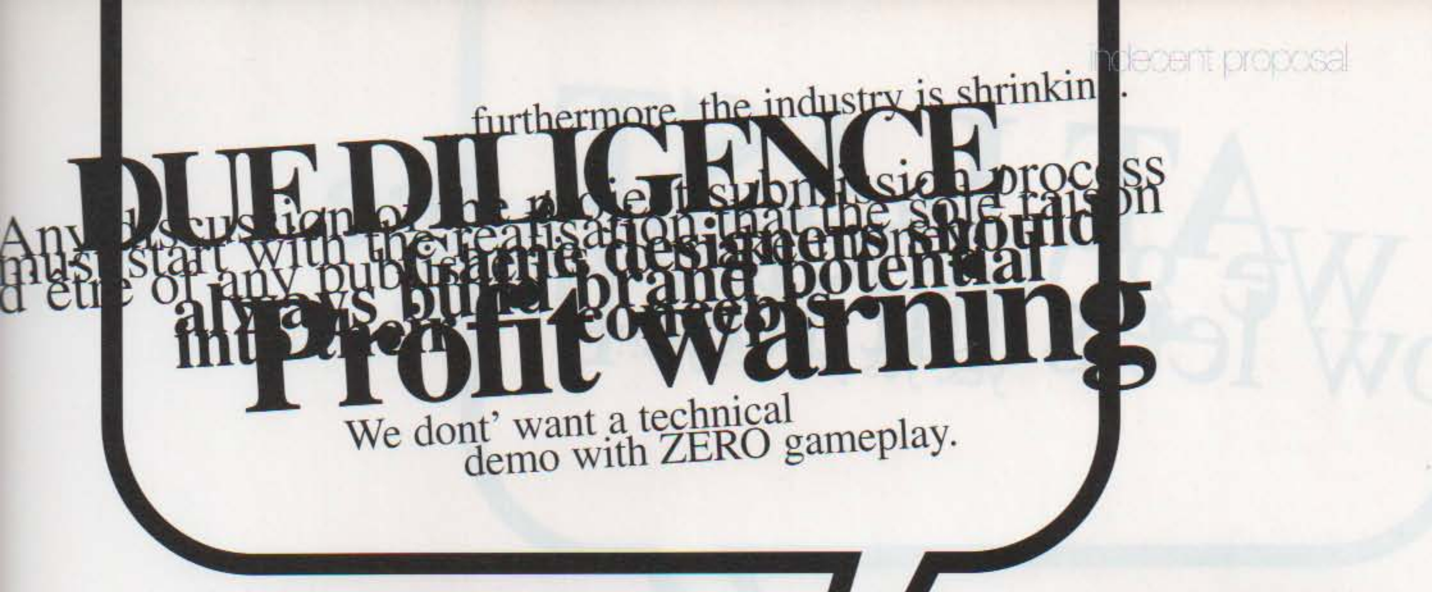
The dream of any publisher is to transform games into 'brands', because effective brands are a massmarket licence to print money – Lara Croft will live on in the public consciousness long after the *Tomb Raider* sequels have become a tired dead horse.

Game designers should always build brand potential into their concepts. This is usually done by hanging the game round a central character, or by having a powerful visual and audio design run through the product, as exemplified by the *Wipeout* series. "Broadly speaking," offers Trotman, "a developer that pitches a game based on a popular and recognisable theme with an aspirational role for the player is on the right track."

Some developers have taken this lesson to heart and are now acquiring licences for themselves, most famously with Rebellion's purchase of the '2000AD' comic. **Mike Woodroffe**, MD at developer Headfirst Productions, has also been active in this area, "If the developer pitches a title to a publisher that contains a renowned licence, then initially its chances of success are higher. Our strategy has been to acquire IP from paper roleplaying games, such as 'Call of Cthulhu', which has the double advantage of providing a wealth of source material."

Crime doesn't pay

"We did a pitch at the English office of an international publisher. The only person there was the UK managing director. When we finished, he said if we slipped him ten grand, he'd get the project signed. We couldn't believe it. But we agreed, and we still didn't get the deal." **Anon Developer**



This strategy paid off for Hothouse whose acquisition of the licence for 'Pop Idols' was a key factor in Codemasters' decision to sign the developer's game based on the hit television show. Developing games around known licences reduces the risk of relying on the development team's own ability to produce appealing intellectual property, while the constant presence of licensed titles in the sales charts is a powerful argument in itself. So although ostensibly a creative text, the design outline is a crucial business document. As is the project plan or schedule.

For reasons far beyond the scope of this article, software scheduling is an act of mass delusion. The vast majority of projects miss their deadlines, yet all of them start out with a detailed delivery schedule broken down into 'milestones' – interim dates when the developer is committed to handing over a block of completed work in exchange for a portion of

Beg, steal or borrow

Developers are starting to look outside the traditional publisher model of finance. Venture capital, government grants, and completion bonding are just some of the sources of potential funding that developers are considering. However, securing sacking of this kind can be just as difficult as finding a publisher. Private finance also places all the project's risk on the developer and may even result in the developer losing control of their own company.

AT LAST

We got the advance

now let's hit the pub.

yes, yes yes yes yes!!

Yes!

in the money

advance funding. Most projects are funded on a staged milestone basis because, in theory, it reduces the publisher's risk. It is very rare indeed for a publisher to pay all the advances up front, and then leave the developer alone for two years, to build the game.

Project schedules form the basis of the developer's cost forecast. The developer must say how much money is required to make the game, and this forecast will be based on staff salaries, overheads and all the usual business operating costs. Most developers buffer their forecasts with a minor profit element, even though profits are only meant to come from actual sales of the game.

Negotiating advances can be tricky. If a developer asks for too much money, the publisher could walk away; but if the developer asks for too little, it may not have enough funds to complete the project especially when, not if, the project slips.

Another problem is that some publishers are suspicious of cheap projects. The general feeling inside EA, for example is that it is not possible to produce a hit title for less than

It could be you

"We signed *Prisoner of War* on the basis of a single sheet of A4 paper containing an overview of the game, which is impressive given today's climate, and most certainly a feather in the cap of Carl Jones from Wide Games. It was the pitch of the decade."

Dean Trotman

$1m (£0.6m), so any developer who asks for less is seen as lacking credibility. This stands in stark contrast to the 1990s when a publisher could buy a top-ten title for less than £100,000. But this ethos can play into the hands of certain 'cowboy' developers who charge exorbitant amounts for their work, and who don't care what happens to their games so long as their businesses turn a profit.

Other documents the developer might prepare are a technical design (explaining how the project will be built, and a description of version control and back-up procedures), a style guide (defining the look of the project), and a risk analysis (an assessment of what could go wrong on the project and how such risks will be managed).

Once the pre-production materials are complete and 'joined up', it's time to get in touch with the publisher.

The decision-makers

Some developers contact publishers very early, to find out what projects publishers are looking for. But publishers' requirements frequently change, and 'frontline' publishing staff usually don't have the authority to sign products up. Grabowski has seen another problem, "Identifying the real decision-makers in a company is vital, and so is keeping track of them. In one year alone nearly 50 per cent of key people across the industry had moved jobs." So there is no reliable way to shortcut the submission process.

Most submissions begin with an email or a phone call to someone who works in an area known variously as, external development, thirdparty development, new business, project acquistions, or something similar. For the sake of brevity, we'll call this person the producer.

Building a good relationship with the producer is a major factor in any successful proposal because the producer is the proposal's 'champion' within the publishing house. If a pitch doesn't have a champion, it will almost certainly fail. That said, some proposals will die at the initial contact stage, if the producer isn't looking for any new titles at the moment.

Although common practice, it's generally not a good idea to present concepts at trade shows such as ECTS. Exhibitions do bring publishers under one roof, but they are noisy, tiring affairs, and the developer is unlikely to have the publisher's undivided attention. And even a good meeting will still only result in the proposal subsequently being handled as a standard submission.

Some publishers refuse to look at material until the developer has first signed a legal agreement protecting the publisher from any liabilities. Some developers are unduly concerned with this, but **Edge** does not know of one case of a publisher being sued for stealing a developer's work.

Occasionally, developers use specialist agencies to approach publishers on their behalf, but the jury is still divided on whether or not these agencies are actually worth the commission they charge on any titles they successfully place with publishers.

What happens once a submission is made varies from case to case but the general process runs as follows. First, the producer will look at the proposal and decide either to reject it, or to hold it for further review. Producers see hundreds of submissions, so they will immediately reject any proposals that are badly presented or that show a lack of professionalism. The producer will also reject proposals that are uninteresting or lacking in business sense. This is a very human process – the producer may reject a game simply because he is in a bad mood.

If the producer likes the submission, he will show it to others within the company, and will probably get back to the developer with requests for further information. The producer may also want to meet the developer. At this point, either a 'buzz' will start to gather around the game, or publishing staff will lose interest in it and the game will be rejected. But if all goes well, the producer will work on getting the proposal to conform with the publisher's formal selection process.

Natural selection

Selection processes vary between companies, but they usually involve the proposal passing through a series of formal and informal checkpoints. The producer may ask the developer to prepare or rework documents using a publisher's specific templates. The producer may ask the developer to carry out additional work on the demo, to prove some gameplay or technical feature. The producer will almost certainly suggest changes to 'improve' the game – and for the developer to work these changes back through the demo and proposal documents.

"Increasingly we see publishers specifying a format for submission," observes Davies. "My guess is that this enables them to cut through developer bullshit quicker, and gives them a format they can easily circulate around the 32 senior executives who need to sign off a pitch."

At some point, the team may be invited to present the game to senior publishing staff. A good presentation can make or break a deal, but publishers are less likely to be impressed by a slick PowerPoint presentation, than they are by a good demonstration from enthusiastic developers with a

Play stalker for me

"One developer I rejected kept hassling me with phone calls and emails, trying to get me to change my mind. Then he got abusive – his game was fantastic and I was a moron for rejecting it. And then I found out he was telling other publishers that he was working in partnership with our company. We set the lawyers on him." **Anon publisher**

"Identifying the real decision-makers in a company is vital, and so is keeping track of them. In one year alone nearly 50 per cent of key people across the industry had moved jobs."



"If we are submitting to a US publisher we will always try to submit to their US and UK offices simultaneously. You have to be able to demonstrate very early on that your title can be a hit world-wide"

clear vision of their game. Publishers will also look to see if the developers have any 'attitude problems' that could make them difficult to work with.

The publisher may also want to send a team of people to visit the developer, to carry out 'due diligence' (a feature to appear later in this series), which means getting under the skin of the developer's operation, to see just how professional, competent and well-managed the development team really is.

Most developers will submit proposals to more than one publisher at a time, which can make pre-production tricky when each publisher offers its own suggestions as to how the game's chances of publication can be improved. Things can be even more tricky when developers receive conflicting demands from different staff within the same publisher.

This overall process can take anything up to nine months, during which period the publisher will look for reasons not to publish the game. The producer may encourage the developer to jump through any number of hoops, as and when the publisher wants, without providing any cash or even any firm commitment to publish. "On one project," Grabowski recalls, "The publisher we were dealing with had layers of management approval to go through. Afte six months of this, the publisher ran out of money and stopped signing any new projects."

But if all goes well, the developer will work with the producer to build a good case for publishing the project, which the producer can then present to the final decision-

makers at a product selection meeting – which may take place only once every few months. The producer must be sure to have the support of every key department, and must be ready to show a demo and support documentation in whatever specific format they're needed. Which is where we came in with Race's rejection of the 200,000-unit title.

Hard targets

The move to high-budget projects means that decision-making power is now concentrated in the hands of one or two people at the top of publishing organisations. Ideally, a developer should identify these people and deal with them directly, but often they are the most difficult people to reach. Not that this deters Davies, "In 90 per cent of cases, we talk directly with the decision-makers. In the other ten per cent – all at publishers we have not pitched to before – it sometimes takes a little time to get to the real target."

A simple way of viewing the complex business of submitting games is that the producer has to wade through various procedural layers to generate enough support within the publisher, so that a senior cross-departmental committee can then recommend the product to the chief executive who makes the final decision. Which is why publishers often seem quick to demand, but slow to decide.

The situation can be exacerbated when dealing with the regional office of an international developer. A UK developer submitting to the UK office of a US company may find the process more difficult, especially where publishers suffer from internal politics. Davies considers localising pitches for different territories extremely important, "If we are submitting to a US publisher we will always try to submit to their US and UK offices simultaneously. You have to be able to demonstrate very early on that your title can be a hit world-wide."

Also, local conditions can work in a developer's favour. As Gamble says, "Currently European developers stand a better chance of securing a deal. Development is cheaper in Europe than in the US, and we can deal with the workload more efficiently. THQ Europe has the power to sign up European (PAL) deals, so we review submissions from any country."

Killer app

"The worst submission I saw was a two-page document from an inexperienced developer for a game combining: 'the scale and realism of *Operation Flashpoint* with the attitude of *GTAIII*.' The player character was a heavily-armed Eskimo in a quest for a sacred seal. Any takers?" **Dean Trotman**

Trotman goes a step further, "We'd accept a product from the Gates of Hell if we felt it had commercial potential."

Tomorrow's world

If all this sounds a little chaotic, it's because it is. Starting any new project is a huge leap of faith for both publisher and developer. A game signed up today may not reach the stores for another three years. No one knows what the hit games of 2006 will look like, yet publishers have no choice but to gamble millions of dollars trying to guess.

Risk permeates the entire industry, and developers must try to alleviate this by making the publisher feel confident about every aspect of the game they're proposing. At times, this may seem impossible. But the developer who genuinely has a great game and who knows how to run a business will ultimately be rewarded in the form of a contract.

And that's when the real work starts...

Signing products the THQ way

Want to know what happens when your pitch reaches THQ Europe? Mike Gamble has the answers:

Step 1. I vet all submissions and make a cut based on quality, current portfolio, platform and developer history.

Step 2. Every six to eight weeks, the MDs and sales directors of the European territories, the head of European brand and myself attend a product evaluation meeting, where the developers who have made the cut, come in and present their titles. At the end of the presentation, we basically say yes or no. We're very interested in seeing new ideas, and our next product evaluation meeting is a two-day affair, where we will be looking at ten pitches.

Step 3. If the answer is yes, the territories provide estimated sales forecasts so I can build a financial model based on the development budget. At this point the title is also referred to the US to run through their 'green light' process.

Step 4. The forecasts show whether the title makes financial sense. US sales estimates are often added, though not always – as with *Broken Sword III* which worked on European sales alone. Again, this is binary; the numbers either work or they don't.

Step 5. If the project still works, we move onto contract negotiation for THQ to publish the title. It's only in the last months that the process has been formalised, but it's already bearing fruit with *Broken Sword III* and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*.

testscreen

The world's most respected videogame reviews

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Wario Ware Inc

It's, like, a ludic pastiche and a witty and ironic commentary about games and gaming. And it's, like, enormous fun. And it's, like, totally supercool. It rocks.

(Game Boy Advance) Nintendo



Burnout 2

The prospect of climbing up the Xbox Live tables has resulted in some serious late night time attack sessions. No number one placings yet. Yet...

(Xbox) Acclaim



Ikaruga

Shameful that it was so difficult to get hold of initially, but we're assured more stock of this blisteringly clever shoot 'em up is arriving. The hi-score table awaits you.

(GameCube) Atari



Ico

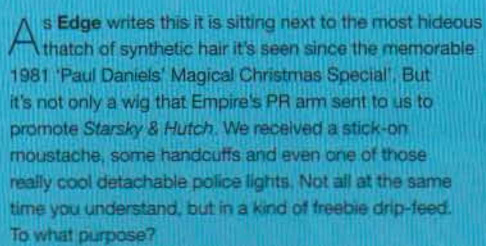
Losing this wonderful, beautiful game proved to be one team member's lowlight of last year. Finding a copy for sale this month has made his life worth living again.

(PlayStation2) SCEE



The freebie heebie-jeebies

Why information is king



As **Edge** writes this it is sitting next to the most hideous thatch of synthetic hair it's seen since the memorable 1981 'Paul Daniels' Magical Christmas Special'. But it's not only a wig that Empire's PR arm sent to us to promote *Starsky & Hutch*. We received a stick-on moustache, some handcuffs and even one of those really cool detachable police lights. Not all at the same time you understand, but in a kind of freebie drip-feed. To what purpose?

It's something that has bamboozled game journalists since the early days of 'Sinclair User'. Can we assume these 'gifts' are a form of bribe? If so, then strange bribes. T-shirts you could understand – if journos wear them then the game gets extra exposure out on the streets. But ant farms, pottery claws and cowboy chaps (all of which have been sent to Future Publishing at one time or another) defy reasonable explanation.

Edge moved offices this month and some hard decisions needed to be made: the freebies accumulated over many years wouldn't fit into the new place. So, sadly, out went the Vivendi Universal horse-blanket, the *No One Lives Forever* cocktail glasses and a delightful boxset of *EverQuest* pens. The Bath branch of Help the Aged has never been so well stocked.

So why the strained attempts to win favour? Put in management-speak, it's all about getting product on radars. Concerned that *Sheep Shearer 2003* lacks pizzazz, a desperate PR will send anything from carding bats to lamb chops if they think it will generate column inches. This happens in other fields of journalism, of course, but **Edge** can't quite imagine their freebies being quite so, well, useless (though you might spot the wig in our *EyeToy: Play* review).

Which might sound like sour grapes but it mystifies **Edge** that so much money gets pumped into such frippery. What **Edge** wants, first and foremost, is information not t-shirts, lighters and badges. To this extent Eidos has always been excellent, and while the new *Tomb Raider* was a disappointment it's a credit to its PR team that they kept us up to date with code and the ever-changing release dates. And let's face it, no amount of free Spandex could have saved it.















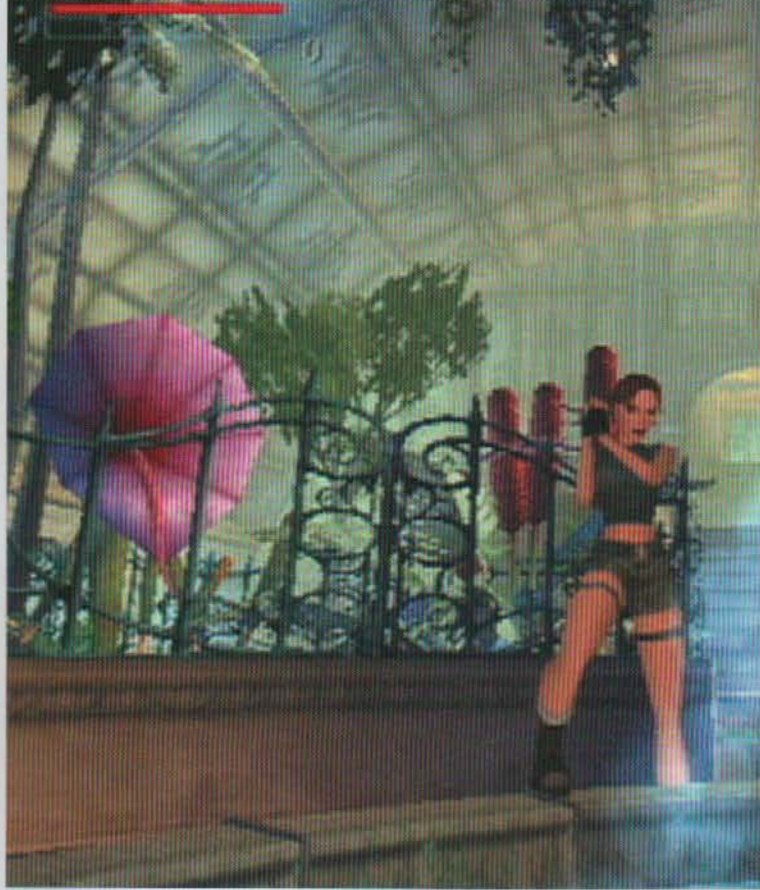


Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness

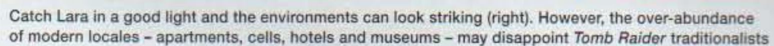
Format: **PS2 (version tested), PC** Publisher: **Eidos Interactive** Developer: **Core Design** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**










Catch Lara in a good light and the environments can look striking (right). However, the over-abundance of modern locales – apartments, cells, hotels and museums – may disappoint *Tomb Raider* traditionalists

What will fans think? How can they possibly forgive Core for making the worst *Tomb Raider* title to date? Thing is, there's an unpalatable truth that needs to be aired right away: Lara Croft has lost her cool. Many suspect she lost it some time ago. That's not to say there aren't thousands of people prepared to buy the game on product recognition alone, but hardcore gamers lost the faith around the time the third *Tomb Raider* game was released.

So the decision to update. First it was episodic content, then RPG elements and finally stealth. While the pipe-dream of downloading *Tomb Raider* episodes was soon abandoned, this final version has retained tentative attempts to spice up the platforming with additional gameplay content. It hasn't been successful.

"This final version has retained tentative attempts to spice up the platforming with additional gameplay content. It hasn't been successful"

The RPG aspects are integrated in two ways. Firstly, Lara is able to upgrade her physical abilities through exertion and interaction with the environment. Can't barge open a door? Then try another in the vicinity until Lara exclaims, "I feel stronger now." The previous door will then give way, opening up a new avenue for exploration. It's a curious system and one that never feels satisfactory. Although some upgrades have a visible physical effect on Lara (such as the 'dash') most feel arbitrary, like a grand design idea that has been scaled back until it merely mimics a traditional key/door puzzle.

Secondly, Lara is able to talk to NPCs she encounters. These conversations throw up simple graphic adventure-style dialogue options. While clearly much work has gone into putting these side-shows together they often feel flat, uninvolving and time consuming. That the text also contains spelling mistakes reflects the game's general air of sloppiness. But these creaky exchanges are not the only thing to feel incongruous.

Fashion has always been a big part of Lara's life. A pity then that she's been forced to don some frankly passé stealth hand-me-downs from superior titles. Stealth is often done so badly that the very mention of the word fills **Edge** with dread. Pressing R2 allows Lara to sneak up on opponents, while X becomes context sensitive making her either perform a neck-break manoeuvre or hug walls. There are prescribed areas in the game where stealth is encouraged, but it's always heavily signposted and rather

Previously in **E**110, **E**125

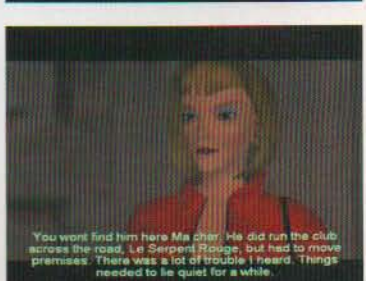












The scanner at the archeological dig facilitates the solving of a genuinely imaginative puzzle (top). Less involving are the dialogue sequences that lack finesse and go on for too long (above)



Combat has never been *Tomb Raider*'s strength but it is especially clumsy and broken in Lara's PS2 outing



half-hearted. Open combat often proves more effective, though this is not without its own flaws (see Shoot to LOL!).

Such 'modernisation' hasn't all been in vain – there's a great attention to detail and the essential *Tomb Raider* atmosphere still draws you in. Yet *The Angel of Darkness* is schizophrenic, never knowing whether it's a platform game, a mystery adventure or a potted RPG. The essence of *Tomb Raider* has been diluted, and its individual strands do not amount to something greater.

So much for the additional content, now for the aspects that made *Tomb Raider* so celebrated on PSone. The most obvious change to the platforming is in the move from digital to analogue control. This has instigated a profound effect on the gameplay. Lara's athleticism should have been the primary concern, yet her clumsy, sticky and frankly annoying movement suggests that Core only began refining it at the last minute. Either that or the level architecture sucked so much out of the PS2 that Lara's been left with a mild and intermittent palsy.

Lara can walk or 'run' (though 'saunter' might be more accurate), but her ponderous animation gives her the appearance of a character in bullet-time. Peculiar when you consider a dash upgrade can be found later on. Furthermore, her jumping never becomes intuitive. A controlled 'hop' jump can be performed (by holding down L1) but it's as annoyingly haphazard as analogue leaping.





Kurtis makes fleeting appearances in the cut-scenes before becoming a playable character. He isn't in the game as much as you might expect and fails to elevate Lara's escapades





Shoot to LOL!

The combat in *The Angel of Darkness* is just as clumsy as the platforming. Toe-to-toe fisticuffs can be instigated merely by pressing the X button near to an enemy. It's frightfully stodgy and unintentionally amusing. Drawing a weapon is marginally more intuitive but the enemies are dumb, really dumb, rendering this component of the game wearisome.

Previously Lara's precise, if somewhat staccato, movements ensured that her leaps could be made with assurance. Levels were designed with discrete blocks and ledges, building up into complex caverns and chambers and then enhanced with clever incidental detail and textures. It was the sheer sense of scale that knocked you out, even induced dizzying vertigo. That sense of scale has largely been lost. There are some impressively realised locations, no doubt, but the sewers of Paris hardly communicate the same grandeur as the Colosseum from the original *Tomb Raider*.

As you'd expect, the consequence of failure is almost always fatal. It wouldn't be *Tomb Raider* without bone-crunching deaths, but a quick restart would have been greatly appreciated. It is possible to save the game at any point, but calling up the necessary menu is slow and loading lengthy. Such rude design is compounded by a Parisian Ghetto section which sees you having to wait for new streets to load after every 20 yards or so.

Apologies if all this sounds unnecessarily bleak, for underneath the carelessness there's a decent game struggling to escape. The game has immense atmosphere, complemented by a superb orchestral soundtrack. Some of the puzzles in the game are ingenious requiring detective work, exploration and leaps of imagination to solve. The levels become better as the game goes on and the plot, though somewhat laboured in places, is engaging.

There's no doubt that *The Angel of Darkness* has been a labour of love. *Tomb Raider* fans who have kept up with the series will not feel too disappointed by the content, they'll just be frustrated with Lara's inability to manoeuvre through her world with confidence.

That this review is being written just days before the release of the game speaks volumes. The lack of tight AI and the abundance of minor glitches suggests that Core could have done with another couple of months for fine tuning. But, then, that's been the case for a while now. If Lara can recover from this misadventure, it will be her greatest feat to date.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

EyeToy: Play

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



If there's one criticism of the first batch of *EyeToy* games it's that they go on for too long, especially in party situations. But *EyeToy* is a brave new world in living-room gaming and this can easily be adjusted



Ghost Catcher (above) asks you to quickly grasp at apparitions as they appear onscreen. Simple stuff, then, but the appeal of *EyeToy* comes from a very human desire to be, and see other people act, the fool

Edge's feature on review scores in **E**124 might have been easier illustrated with *EyeToy*, which is the finest possible example of how a game, its audience, the environment in which it's played, and all the many permutations contained therein cannot be summed up by a number. The chances are that by now you'll have already glanced down and seen the final verdict. Ignore it, because the chances are that it won't apply to you.

"It is so immediate and so accessible and so fun that, on visiting EyeToy for the first time, it is quickly apparent that this is something special"

Perhaps more than any other game **Edge** has ever reviewed, *EyeToy* has the opportunity to revolutionise videogaming. Not just by inspiring other developers to take up the challenge of integrating the peripheral Webcam into their projects, but by providing an interface that is completely controller free, and making games more accessible than they've ever been before. If you can stand in front of *EyeToy*, then you can participate. There is nothing to be scared of anymore. If people know it exists, they will buy into it.

It is disappointing, then, that *EyeToy* is not as great as it might have been.

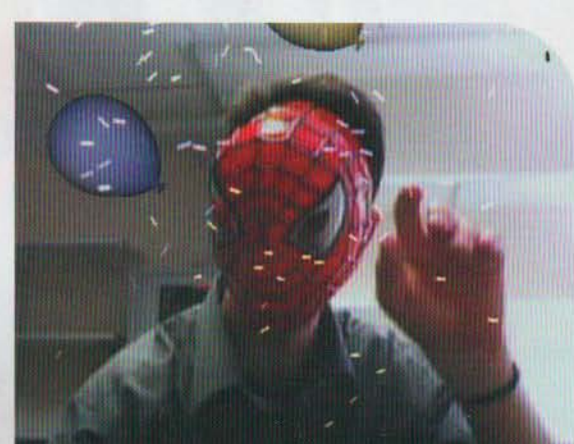
The centre of the impeccably presented package (which also contains video messaging software and a filter-based 'playroom') is a number of simple, three-minute, score-challenge games. In each of these, players stand in front of the camera, and the camera projects them onto the screen and into the game. The games ask the player to do something simple, like box a robot or wash a window. They do this by boxing the robot, or washing the window.

It is so immediate and so accessible and so fun that, on visiting *EyeToy* for the first time, it is quickly apparent that this is something special. Call it the thrill of the new; but when the new becomes old, some cracks appear. Three minutes per game is too long for this kind of activity, particularly in a party situation. Players want in and out fast, and while exhaustion can be entertaining, it makes the game seem more monotonous than it is.

And there are sometimes flaws within th games themselves. Boogie Down, for example, is spectacular game design marre by a timing error. Five lights surround the player, and light up in sequence on the beat The player must then hit them in the same sequence and rhythm, forcing them to perform extravagant '70s-style hand jiving. But unfortunately, to hit the lights at the righ time the player must begin moving slightly before the beat, an unnatural sensation which subtracts much of the fun.















It's not the only design flaw that irritates. On the other hand, some of the problems couldn't have been avoided. *EyeToy* works by detecting movement, and can't distinguish between body parts. Which means there's nothing, for example, to stop you using your hands on the game that asks you to juggle a ball with your head, or just whirling your arms constantly to defeat all the ninjas in Kung Foo. The game demands self-discipline in singleplayer, and that makes it less enjoyable. In multiplayer this criticism is irrelevant, since people can make (and enforce) rules.

And they can get involved, and fall over, and laugh and play and collapse. *EyeToy* comes into its own when placed in a social situation and, for once, it doesn't just work among people who know how to hold a pad. It's not the greatest game of all time – it would be odd if it was, because this is a brave new world – but it is, perhaps, the most inclusive. On that reasoning, *EyeToy* could receive a ten, because it's potentially revolutionary. **Edge** could also give it a four, because sometimes it disappoints. However, *EyeToy* will get an eight, because it's excellent, and has quickly become a favourite with friends. What you give it depends on what you get out of it, and that depends on what you put into it. Your choice, but we would recommend People.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten





Enter the Playroom – presumably designed for toddlers, though enjoyed by Edge – and you'll find many neat effects. The bees (left) can be swatted while coloured swirls will enhance any rave (right)

Star Trek: Elite Force II

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Ritual Entertainment** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**





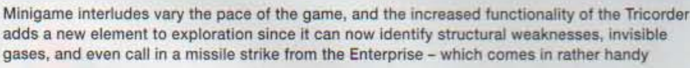












Minigame interludes vary the pace of the game, and the increased functionality of the Tricorder adds a new element to exploration since it can now identify structural weaknesses, invisible gases, and even call in a missile strike from the Enterprise – which comes in rather handy

The original *Elite Force*, developed for Activision by Raven Software, was a solidly entertaining, well-paced firstperson shooter, featuring a fairly accurate interpretation of the 'Star Trek' licence, introducing a couple of new alien races after initially pitting players against the Borg, and including a comprehensive multiplayer component. All of which is, coincidentally enough, true of *Elite Force II* as well – apart from the bit about Raven Software. In fact, about the only major changes that Ritual Entertainment has made for the sequel is the introduction – not entirely welcome – of several platforming sections and an increase incidence of bosses.

By and large though, this is a reasonably impressive, if wholly conventional, FPS. A couple of new alien foes provide much of the cannon fodder, with their insect-like intelligence justifying AI that's low on sophistication but perfectly capable of producing the odd burst of adrenaline-fuelle action. Weapons are a fairly standard variant on FPS staples, with sniper rifles, shotguns, machine guns and grenade/rocket launchers all represented. And scripted events are use with some skill to give the game a steady an well-balanced impetus – not to mention a fe surprises along the way.

Equally important for a game such as thi it's a pretty convincing depiction of the 'Star Trek' universe. A voice cast that includes the talents of Patrick Stewart and Tim Russ lend some gravitas to an otherwise inconsequent plot (which features 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' no less). Players are also given the freedom to wander round the decks and bridge of the Enterprise E, and a brief spell a Starfleet Academy should keep the majority 'Star Trek' fans happy.

Nevertheless, there are one or two irritations. The game is at its weakest during the tedious, sudden-death platforming sections that occur far too frequently, and during the drawn-out boss encounters that act as a coda to most missions. There is no need for passages of play that see you jumping across moving pistons, or attemptin to avoid jets of flame while also attempting t navigate moving walkways. These sections don't add anything apart from frustration, while the game's largely uninspired bosses add little apart from artificial longevity. Which a shame because this takes the gloss off an otherwise polished product.

Edge rating: Six out of te

Minigames, starships and secrets

Ritual's inclusion of several minigames isn't entirely successful. At various points throughout the game, the use of the Tricorder initiates one of two minigames; one in which an electrical current is re-routed, and one in which a waveform must be altered to match another. Trouble is these are, necessarily, so simple as to be pointless. Likewise a sort of dating game, in which conversation choices lead to courtship success, is similarly shallow, though an interesting diversion. Secrets in the form of starships that unlock deathmatch extras work better.



Ghost Master

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Empire Interactive** Developer: **Sick Puppies** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**110, **E**115, **E**122

It's worth emphasising that *Ghost Master* does *not* slavishly follow the blueprint laid down by *The Sims*, not least because its publisher does little to dispel the notion. To feature graphics that are superficially similar is one thing. To use boxart with near-identical Poser models is quite another, particularly when the characters are flanked by magazine blurbs referencing EA's bestseller. With such a blatant attempt to piggyback the marketing on the success of another title it comes as a relief to discover that the game itself is too preoccupied with its own gleefully ghoulish ideas to cannibalise those of any others.

Equally pleasing is the care and attention taken with the in-game presentation. Sterling voicework, intelligent use of cut-scenes and richly animated visuals, provide a luxurious look and feel. And while the horror spoofing is cute rather than funny, the approach makes this a game to immediately warm to. Staying the distance is another matter.

The control system is unwieldy, but works as well as any attempt to offer a degree of camera control could be expected to, and it's a small price to pay given the way the game makes the most of its 3D environments with both remote and firstperson viewpoints. Less easy to forgive is the need to activate powers by wading through a nested menu system.

But it's with the lack of visual feedback that the charm offensive grinds to a halt. Certainly the sight of a human cowering or running away indicates when a spell is effective, but it's still necessary to constantly reference the numerous fright meters in each individual's pop-up window to get a solid idea of how things are progressing. For a game so graphically adept, this feels clumsy and unnatural, and makes the whole process of inducing the jitters maddeningly nebulous.

Ghost Master also highlights the dangers of freeform gaming. Its more entertaining elements require the coercion of a level's human inhabitants to solve puzzles, but many levels rely more heavily on simply scaring away the good guys. As a result gameplay frequently devolves into bouts of point-and-clicking, setting up a sequence of horrors with which to corral and frighten inhabitants.

A sandbox approach is all very well, but the lack of structure makes an unholy pact with that lack of obvious action and reaction, draining the game of any tension or real thrills. While far from lifeless, *Ghost Master* isn't the hellraiser it might have been.

Edge rating: Six out of ten











From an undead door-to-door saleswoman to a Cenobite-like creature that rips its own torso in two, the cast of characters is certainly diverse





Humans have terror, belief, madness and will power gauges. On levels where people are needed to achieve an objective these must be carefully managed. Otherwise, the aim is to push the victims to their limits

Oh so Sim pull

It has been suggested that *Ghost Master* turns the concept of *The Sims* on its head in much the same way that Bullfrog's *Dungeon Keeper* did with 'Dungeons & Dragons'. In play, however, it soon becomes clear that this has little in common with *The Sims'* blend of Little Computer People voyeurism and classic roleplaying. Indeed it's with the aforementioned title from Bullfrog that this shares a lineage. A design that has players using a team of ghouls to scare humans, thus boosting supernatural resources, which in turn can be spent on further scare tactics, clearly tags this is a god sim, albeit one with infernal trappings.

Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter

Format: **PlayStation2 (version tested), Xbox, PC, GC** Publisher: **Vivendi Universal** Developer: **Warthog** Price: **£40** Release: **August**

Previously in **E**101, **E**110, **E**125









Sure, *Mace Griffin* blatantly steals components from *Halo* but it does have its own charming alien mythos. But damn those loading screens



Gun play

Although the basic weapon types inevitably follow FPS convention (pistol, rifle, sub-machine gun and grenades, and on to heavier artillery via progress through the levels), shooting them is still enjoyable. The emulation of *Halo* does not extend to a limit on weapons carried, but the tangible tension during protracted reloading and while scavenging for the game's relatively sparse ammo stocks ensures that firing them doesn't get stale. Ingenious second uses and plentiful opportunities for strategic long-range duels enhance their appeal further.







The space combat is weak but it gives the game a greater sense of scale; you wander into ships, take elevators to cargo holds, and walk right into the cockpit. It's a brave attempt and one worth experiencing

The universe may be infinite, but as far as developers are concerned, the options for interior decoration out there are pretty limited. So *Mace Griffin*'s title screen suggest an obscure 'Star Wars' spin-off novel, the HUD and its rechargeable lifebar *Halo*, while its hazard-striped stylings and creeping gloom recall *Half-Life*. The recruitment of Henry Rollins to voice the hero might have been just the thing for an injection of some unique character into the game, if only tough but-fair Griffin hadn't emerged from captivity for a crime he didn't commit, of course.

Thankfully, what's absent in originality is made up for in execution. *Mace Griffin* is more firstperson shooting in space, but it's often rich with atmosphere and has been given a comic-book finish which transforms its gloomy FPS worlds and general sense of déjà vu into vivid, living threats. The narrative glue consists of inter-mission trips to the bounty-hunting agency for new challenges, but that's not a cue for free-roaming mayhem in space. Although there are times when its great vistas and set-piece flourishes give a good impression of a *Halo*-inspired sci-fi sandbox, *MG:BH* is a far more linear, limited and stage-directed experience than that. There are very brief patches of wandering and excursions in cylindrical elevators, but they are not so much puzzles as diversions t balance the pace. The shooting's the thing.

All of which means it's hard to know wha to make of the space sections which sporadically interrupt the firstperson action. It's exactly the kind of stage-directed fly-shoot-land stuff seen in *Rogue Leader*, minu the priceless IP and any real sense of depth or speed – pretty enough, but mostly vapid.

It's hard to say precisely where *Mace Griffin* will fit, as its sudden deaths and long gaps between checkpoints may not go dow too well with the console mainstream, while its arcade sensibilities and the occasions on which enemy AI routines become comedy routines are likely to distress PC specialists.

Regardless of potential purist quibbles, it armoury is solid and satisfying (see Gun play And since – when the button-pressing 'mission' fluff and limp flying bits are taken ou of the equation – this is a game about guns, that is a good thing. Indeed, for all limits and borrowings, *Mace Griffin*'s greatest touches are all devoted to making shooting aliens exhilarating – and, in videogame terms, it doesn't get any purer than that.

Edge rating: Seven out of te

Starsky & Hutch

Format: **PlayStation2 (version tested), Xbox, PC** Publisher: **Empire Interactive** Developer: **Mind's Eye** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**116, **E**120, **E**121

While *Starsky & Hutch*'s genre is fundamentally the same as *The Getaway*'s, the genetic code of *Driver* running thick as oil in each game's engine, the two games are diametrically opposed in philosophy. That much is obvious from the moment the story begins, *Starsky & Hutch*'s slick cartoon frontend dumping you in a world that's as enthusiastic and primary as Alex Hammond's is miserable and grey. It is an old debate, reduced to two pieces of software; fun versus realism.

Broadly, though, the in-car shenanigans are much the same as they've always been – get there fast, or mess him up him faster – with two touches that make the game a little more special. First, the viewer rating system, which is roughly equivalent to a timing mechanism. Viewers drift away disinterested as the chases go on, and if the number reaches zero the show gets cancelled. Bringing them back requires players to shoot bonus icons, or perform ridiculous 'Starsky & Hutch'-style stunts. Hitting special star icons performs set-pieces, driving over ramps induces slow-mo and jump bonuses.

Second, the gun targeting, which draws from a similar point 'n' aim system to Activision's *World's Scariest Police Chases*, but ups the sophistication by including a focusing reticule. That allows players to trade speed of shot for much greater impact, and a satisfying yell from Starsky – "Great shot, partner!" or whatever. Pleasingly, Starsky and Hutch enjoy the same affectionate relationship they do in the show. The quips are stilted and repeat, but there's enough of them for it not to grate. When you're driving inside a structure – a mall or a roller-rink – the partners' voices echo. It might seem like a small touch, but it's ultimately indicative of the care that's gone into the game.

See, while *The Getaway* had lofty cinematic ambition and fell far short of its target, *Starsky & Hutch* just wants to be a dumb TV show and manages to emphatically impart that disposable, single-shot energy so crucial to a successful light-entertainment show. It is a simple beast, whose lasting appeal comes from score attack and finding secrets rather than any real-world depth. Some might regard the superficiality as a criticism, and, sure, it doesn't do a lot. But what it does, it does confidently, happily and with some aplomb.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten













The visual style is disarmingly simple and complements the no-brainer action perfectly. But then, Mind's Eye's game is not wholly dumb: there are fresh ideas and the game shows impeccable balance and polish



Having a friend drive while you take over shooting duty with a lightgun is tremendous fun. But which is better: Starsky or Hutch?



Good cop/bad cop

Starsky & Hutch supports cooperative lightgun and steering wheel play, giving two players a chance to opt a little further into realism, and live that cop show dream. It's not as easy as Soul and Glaser make it seem, but the human interplay is worth it, albeit not necessarily in keeping with the relaxed attitude of the '70s superstars. **Edge** finds itself screaming at **Edge** to take the car closer, then being screamed at by **Edge** because it isn't hitting a dime-sized target careering across the screen faster than its speeding bullets. Light entertainment indeed.

Wario World

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Treasure** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**125











Once all the hidden treasure from each level is recovered, a new taster of *Wario World* becomes available for download to your GBA

If platform games were, well, platform games, they would have as their enemies camera control, interminable collectables, fiddly jumps and needless sprawl. The main boss would be an over-elaborate hub world, and he'd attack with chirpy music and a salv of patronising tips. *Wario World* double-jump on the head of these concerns. The main game takes a quasi-side-on approach, which allows the camera to be effectively forgotten. Progress is swift, driven by Wario's momentum and your own curiosity. Each of the eight themed levels hides another eight mini-levels, which operate in a similar way to the secret stages in *Super Mario Sunshine*. Fully 3D, these treat-sized tests of ingenuity and agility may only take seconds to complete but they represent the purest platforming challenges in the game.

The game is deceptively compact – each level allows a straight-ahead dash to the finish, but focused exploration reveals alternate routes and hidden areas. There are no power-ups – the reward for finishing each level is, simply and happily, gaining access to the next. Environments are unremarkable, bu the enemies, principally the bosses, show Treasure's flair for delightful depravity.

As does Wario himself. Magnificently boorish, he taunts his unconscious enemies and sucks up coins with a gargling swagger. His world is sticky and gleeful: glue-globes have a tacky tactility, and counters clock the Richter-scale force with which you piledrive your opponents. Yet the game itself is impeccably mannered, doing everything it can to avoid getting in the way of your fun.

Dying is a petty inconvenience you can buy your way out of. Falling off a level results in a moderately tedious detour, not a punitive restart. The health of bosses does not reset should you die, and everything accomplished is always saved. The difficulty curve is controlled through precision and complexity, not by mindless repetition or proliferation.

There are niggles. The game doesn't always provide enough enemies where you need to use their dazed bodies as deadweight for spinning or stomping tasks, and when it does, the collision detection can be more miss than hit. The decision to include extra, buckshee bosses takes the edge off the game's exuberant pace. But if *Wario World* was a platform game, and it is, it would be a very good one. And it is.

Edge rating: Seven out of te



Playground warfare

Combat is more of a playground scrap than the orderly precision often called for in platformers. Wario punches his way through the leering hordes, grabbing inert bodies and enormous pillars to use as clubs and missiles. The system works because Wario is hurt only by attacks, not by contact, allowing him to safely shoulder his way to the centre of the brawl. It's a nice nod to the Wario's invulnerability in earlier GB games, and takes the sting out of continually respawning enemies.



In an unusually real world bit of game logic, Wario uses garlic dispensers to restore his hearts, and thus his health. The cost rises throughout the game

Ghost Vibration

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Atari** Developer: **Artoon** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

It sounds like mission statement sloganeering: "Here at Ghost Vibration the only way is forward!" It's the plain truth, however. George, the game's reluctant hero, may be exploring a cursed and blighted mansion looking for ghosts to siphon up with his souped-up spear gun, but the player's responsibility extends only to pushing the control stick forward. George, you see, is following a predetermined path, and all the player can do is move him along it like a tram. Only on encountering a murderous spirit does the viewpoint switch, and allow you to regain control of your sights, if not your feet.

It's an incredibly restrictive system, but one which leads to a number of unexpected freedoms. The first is an escape from the incessant wandering, backtracking and indecision that so many survival horror titles fall prey to. And **Edge** happily concludes that a total absence of key/door/lever/drawbridge puzzles is infinitely preferable to their repetitive and perfunctory inclusion. It's also a system that allows for some properly spooky showboating from the camera. Slithering backwards and forwards between thirdperson and firstperson, it shudders and lurches behind you, sometimes corkscrewing like a rollercoaster, sometimes bucking in a corner like a trapped animal. It means you can't always see where you're going, but that hardly matters, since you're going there whether you want to or not.

Apparitions are triggered at certain points of your route, and fighting them is a moderately satisfying juggle of aiming and timing. Bosses, for once, prove the most satisfying opponents, since they release a stream of drogue spirits which dart and glide like piranhas. But with little or no variation throughout the game, it's a thrill that soon palls. Character models are blotchy but likeable, and their animation can be startlingly natural and fluid. Mostly, however, it seesaws from the camp to the clumsy, and the lip-synching is enthrallingly awful.

Ghost Vibration could hardly be a slighter game. There are no weapon upgrades, no exploration and the same mansion settings are re-used over and over. The end is in sight after just three or four hours' play, though revisiting will unearth some more bashful ghosts and up that precious percentage rating. Doing so, however, risks exposing an enjoyable, disposable experience to more scrutiny than it can bear.

Edge rating: Five out of ten









The scratchy milkiness of the ghosts contrasts with the simple, blocky environments, and emphasises their threatening, alien nature







Ghosts are sucked through the spear gun into George's holding tank. Powerful ghosts require more prolonged sucking, which can cause the spear gun to overheat. Frantic button bashing brings the temperature down to useable levels



Save our souls

Each of the nine episodes ends with a chance to read the scattered memories of the captured ghosts, and these dossiers build, chapter by chapter, into a chilling compendium of horror which you'll treasure forever. The plot is as lightweight as the gameplay, but laying it out like a breadcrumb trail makes it compelling. Each generation of children, servants, soldiers, scientists and occultists add their frenzied voices to the hundred years of bloodshed the mansion has witnessed.

Smash Cars

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: Metro 3D Developer: Creat Studio Price: £20 Release: August

Previously in E112, E113, E123









A training level introduces the basics: boosts, air tricks and bashing. The Championship mode is race-heavy, but there are diversions into stunt and ramming levels (which double as minigames). The challenge isn't epic, but the twoplayer option helps extend the game's life

Edge has played a fair few R/C racers in recent years, but it would be hard pressed now to say what, if anything, was supposed to differentiate each one from the rest. *Smash Cars*, however, deserves to be remembered. Not for its irritatingly dinky dance BGM or its perfunctory presentation, but for the way it actually engages with and exploits the R/C concept.

This never just feels like a shrunken road race, as the plasticky physics of the game's monster trucks and garish dragsters demand a different outlook, and the interaction with the Brobdingnagian world around is near-constant. The race zones in old-school axis of evil hotspots (Cuba, China, the USSR) are packed with obstacles and stunt opportunities and the rules of the road soon become clear, and their loopholes forgivable.

You can scrape under real motor cars to save time on roads, ramraid a squawking rooster or a beach ball to score points, or be ambushed by events when a peace-seeking holidaymaker reaches down and throws your car off-course in disgust, or a soldier starts taking potshots. This is virtual R/C racing that, for once, is exciting enough to stop you wishing you were tooled up with a real Tamiya down the park.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Summer Heat Beach Volleyball

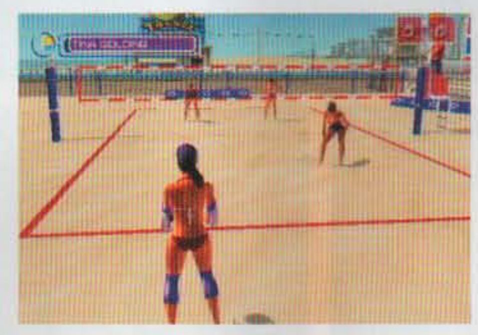
Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: Acclaim Developer: In-house (Acclaim Studios Cheltenham) Price: £40 Release: Out now

With its zoomable camera and subtle ball control, *Summer Heat* sits so squarely between the titillation of *DoAX* and the satisfaction of *Beach Spikers*, why, it almost seems deliberate.

Shot selection – serves, passes, sets and spikes – is determined by circumstance, but can be modified by button choice, positioning and timing. The pace of the ball is cumulative, requiring players to construct points carefully. Colour-coded targets, arrows and markers are overwhelming but informative. So informative, in fact, that the game would still be playable if the characters and ball were invisible. It's a system that hampers the accessibility of the multiplayer modes (two- and fourplayer, cooperative and competitive), and doesn't prevent rallies evolving into stalemates.

Extras feel perfunctory – the minigames won't hold you for long, and the unlockable costumes are disappointing, with characters' bikinis cycling through the colours like traffic lights. Other bonuses are accessible through your Beach House, which you can tour, much in the manner of an Ikea 3D kitchen planner. But however cynical the market positioning, *Summer Heat* is solid, extensive and demanding.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









The bland summery prettiness of the setting is undermined by relentless Acclaim branding, and the incessant presence of the three big-name licensed songs. The latter, if not the former, can be turned off

Naruto 'Gekito Ninja Taisen'

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Tomy/Bandai** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E122**

Naruto' began in 1999 as a Japanese manga series. Popularity turned it into anime, and popularity of the cartoon has brought about Bandai's first *Naruto* game. Since the series is mostly about young fighters fighting, it makes sense that *Naruto* the game has become a beat 'em up. And, since the series is intended for a young audience, it is bright and simple and hyperactive, so it makes sense that *Naruto* is cel-shaded, fast-paced and rarely challenging.

Players attack with two buttons and combinations thereof. Blocks are automatic, while a ludicrously swift dodge left or right with the shoulder buttons will often place the defendant in an ideal position to take advantage of misjudged lunges. Counters can also be used, providing the character's chakra bar contains enough energy. If it's full, they can use a super special by hitting a single button.

And that, essentially, is that. *Naruto* looks fine, but plays unexceptionally for the 20 minutes it'll take you to play through and complete. It's a fighting game primer, ideal to teach the themes that all beat 'em ups are based around, but of very little use to anyone who's ever played one before.

Edge rating: Three out of ten









There's some satisfaction to be had from the dodging, but *Naruto*'s combat is rudimentary, and it won't take long to master the rhythmic binary combos required to defeat even the most hardy opponent

Hulk

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2, GC** Publisher: **Vivendi Universal** Developer: **Radical Entertainment** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E122**



Hulk can damage environment furniture, pick up the debris and throw it at enemies. This should have given the game a *Rampage*-like gratification, but the combat is shallow and the game ultimately becomes a test of your patience rather than your skill







Hulk is a lumbering, dense creature that shows little sensitivity. And so is the game. As with any poorly thought-out thirdperson combat title *Hulk* falls down because of its lack of variety and delicacy. While there may be a number of attacks in the game most of them are redundant. Pounding countless generic enemies with such a basic combat system soon gets tiresome.

In an attempt to introduce some variety, the developer has included a blend of game styles. In addition to Hulk's wanton destruction there are some stealth levels. As Bruce Banner you must infiltrate enemy facilities to discover the antidote to his affliction. It's just a pity that neither gameplay style is interesting.

Indeed, the stealth sections are broken. Get discovered and, unless you are supremely lucky, it's game over. There's no manual control over the camera and blundering into unseen enemies becomes irksome very quickly. There's a firstperson viewpoint, but it takes so long to trigger that enemies will have changed direction before you begin moving again.

Hulk does display an excellent visual style but it's not enough to divert attention from the gameplay. Put simply, *Hulk* is poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

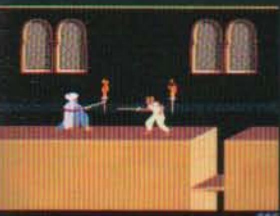
Prince of Persia

Edge takes a fresh look at a seminal game classic from yesteryear

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Brøderbund** Developer: **In-house** Release: **1989**







cing can be very tense; the illusion
each enemy fights with a different
e is carried off superbly

It's the animation that grabs you from the start. The hero can run, leap, climb and fence – nothing extraordinary there – but he does so with such effortless fluidity that you initially just gape in wonder. Indeed, *Prince of Persia* is one of those games that is almost as appealing to watch as it is to play. Almost.

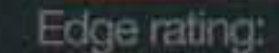
Thankfully there's no elaborate plot or lengthy loading times to dilute the purity of the action. One princess, a high tower, an evil despot and an elaborate dungeon full of pit-falls and swarthy cutlass-wielding adversaries. Classic ingredients cooked up into one of the finest platform games to have emerged in recent years.

For all the hero's flamboyant suppleness the game's framework is very simple. Each level has a number of pits and traps that you must navigate with precise positioning and expertly timed leaps. Running clearly builds up momentum, but makes timing your leap much harder, while stepping tentatively to the edges of platforms enables you to perform standing jumps – shorter but pixel precise.

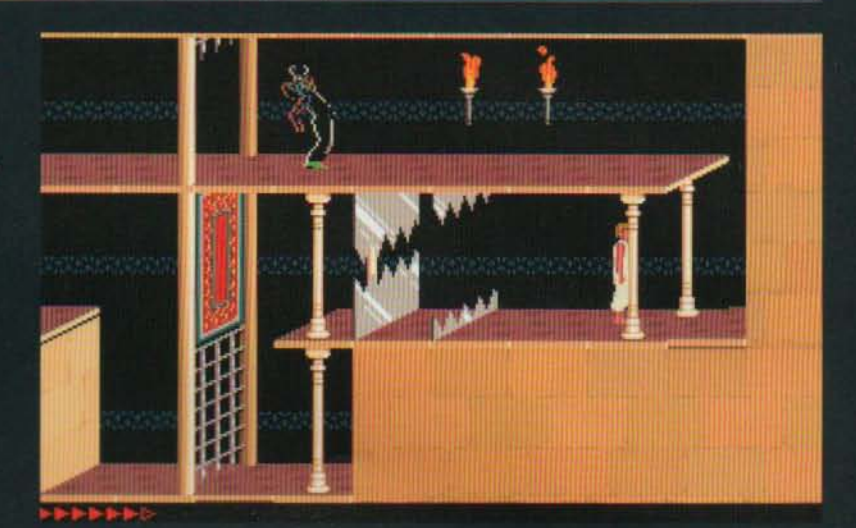
But be warned: this is bitter-sweet platforming. Annoyance results from the fact that your memory is on test as much as your reflexes. There are clever puzzles – jumping on the spot can release unsound ceiling titles to open new avenues, for instance – and health (and poison) potions appear as added lures to the more intrepid explorer willing to take risks.

As the levels become more intricate, so do the skills of your enemies; the tense fencing encounters help to add an extra dimension to game. While these battles revolve around a defend, retreat and lunge mechanic, it's testament to the skill of the developer that bouts can build into very absorbing tests of dexterity and patience.

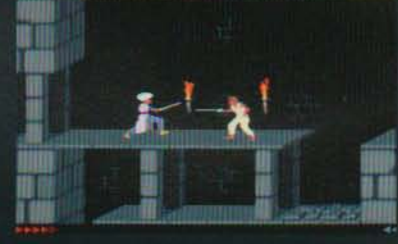
Prince of Persia is also a superbly detailed game: observe how tiles crumble into minute pieces or how the hero can inch his way over spike-trapped floors. While the structure is somewhat repetitive, and there's little visual distinction between the 13 levels, *Prince of Persia*'s beauty lays in its mechanical precision, rather than its graphical flair.



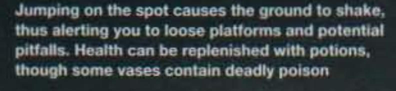
Edge rating: Eight out of ten



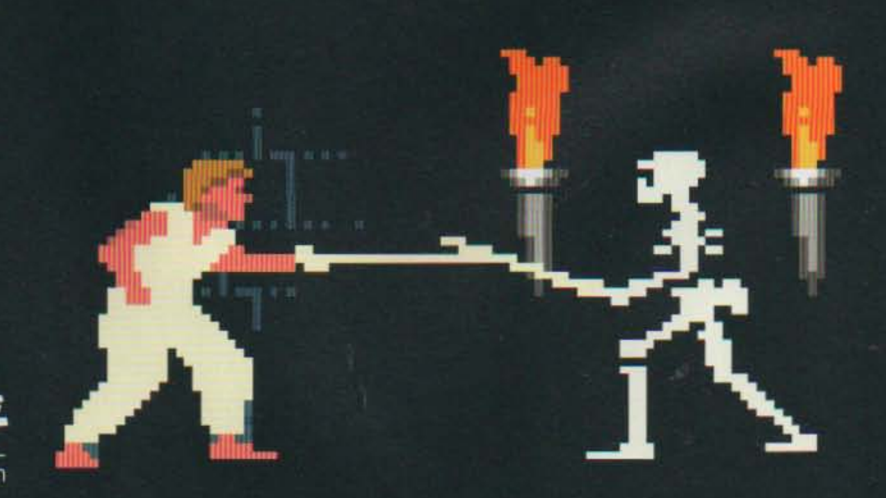






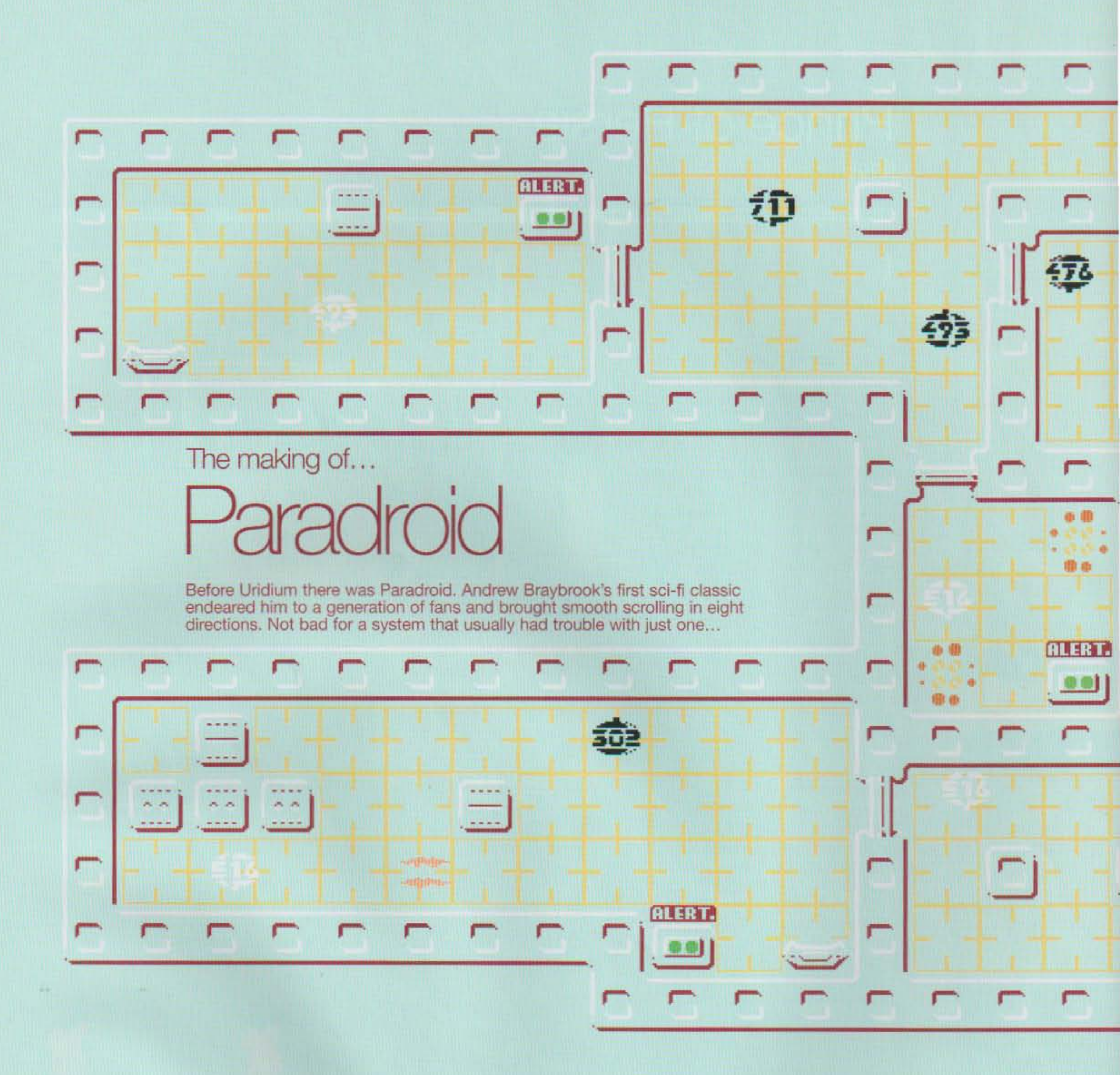


Jumping on the spot causes the ground to shake, thus alerting you to loose platforms and potential pitfalls. Health can be replenished with potions, though some vases contain deadly poison



ands of time

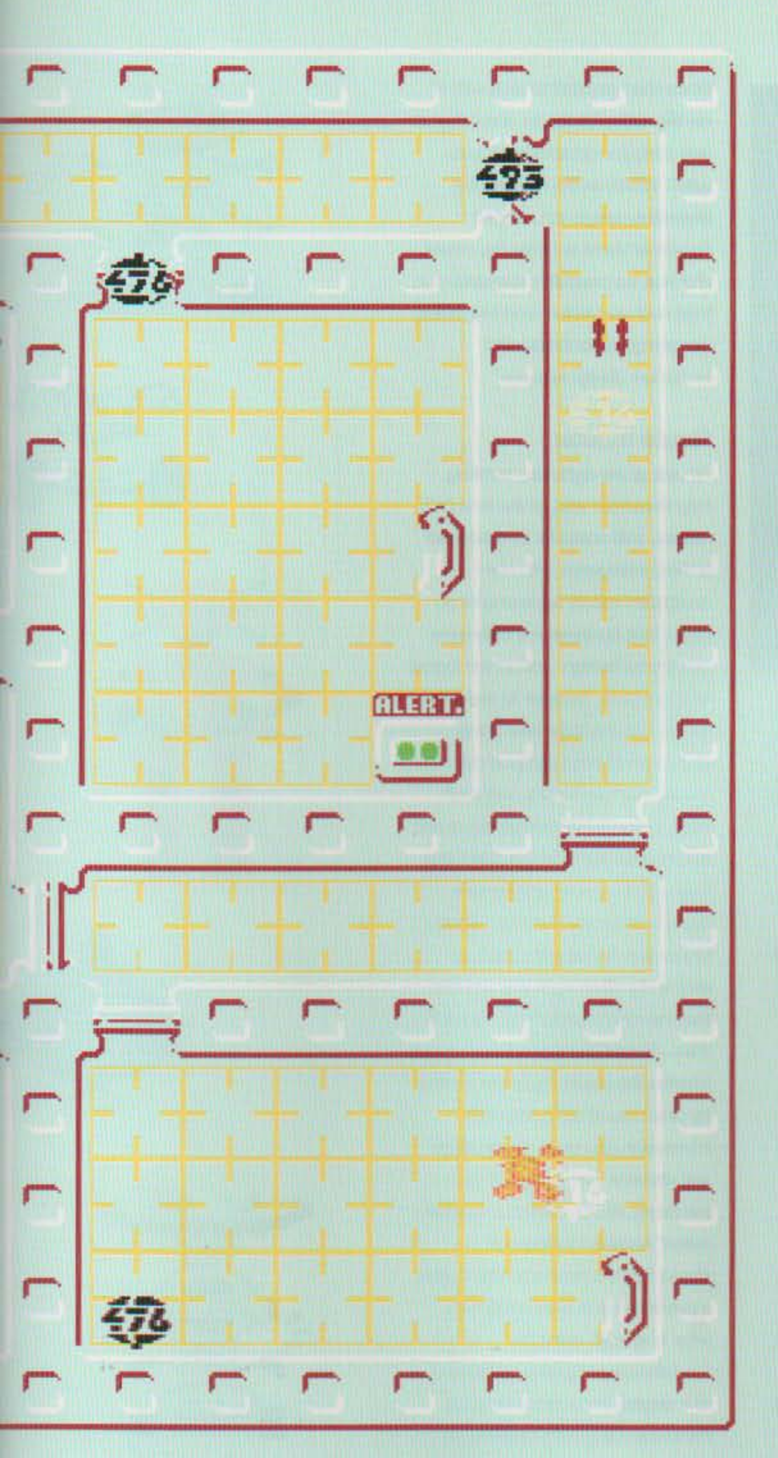
ince of Persia just kept breeding. ter emerging on the PC its word-of- outh popularity soon saw Jordan echner's rotoscoping opus proliferate to nearly every viable platform. This akes a version of the game traordinarily easy to get hold of day. It has lost none of its charm and e precise digital nature of the sitioning and movement became a mplate for a new generation of 3D atformers – embodied most patently the original *Tomb Raider* (1996).



The making of...

Paradroid

Before Uridium there was Paradroid. Andrew Braybrook's first sci-fi classic endeared him to a generation of fans and brought smooth scrolling in eight directions. Not bad for a system that usually had trouble with just one...



Original format: **Commodore 64**
Publisher: **Hewson**
Developer: **Graftgold**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1985**

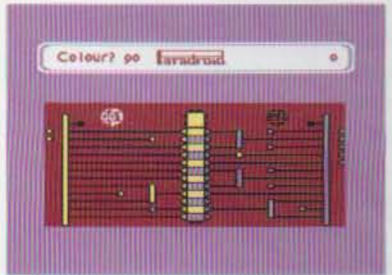
Science-fiction games were hardly a rare commodity back at the dawn of home computing, but *Paradroid*'s mixture of remote-control robotics, 'body'-swapping and abstract level design gave it a very distinctive flavour. Relating its story with a brevity typical of the era *Paradroid* asked you to take control of a robotic 'Influence Device', sent in to eradicate a fleet of spaceships full of rogue robots. Although equipped with a pair of weak laser cannons the primary means of silicon-based genocide was achieved through possessing other bigger and more powerful robots and using their abilities, and security access, to prey on ever larger droids.

The game was viewed from a top-down perspective and scrolled smoothly in eight directions – which was a rare enough trick in the arcades at the time and unheard of on the C64. Unusually, though, the game did not pretend to portray the action as it really was, but implied that it was instead a computerised blueprint viewed through a 'C64 terminal'. This helped to explain why the entire gameworld was composed only of, admittedly stylish, two-tone bas-relief images and the robots were all portrayed as simple ovals containing a three-digit number (your Influence Device was 001 and the Command Cyborg was 999). An image of what the robots really looked like could be viewed only by logging onto a ship's console.

Although his long-time collaborator Steve Turner helped with the sound effects and advice on the gameplay, *Paradroid* was almost all **Andrew Braybrook**'s own work. As he says, "I really wanted to produce a game where I had done everything on my own, and *Paradroid* was the closest I ever came to that."

The original concept for the game was relatively vague. Braybrook recalls how most of Graftgold's ideas came about. "We would think about what we would like to see the C64 do, preferably something that hadn't been done before. At that time we thought that every new game should be different not just from our previous game, but different from anything anyone else was doing. I was always interested in trying something new, that was perhaps the most important thing to me." The only significant influence for what would become *Paradroid* came from one of Braybrook's earlier games called *Survive*, which he had written for his own amusement in COBOL to run on an IBM mainframe. Running in realtime *Survive* involved up to four players, who could only see each other by line of sight, and two robot





The difficulty of the transfer game is determined by the difference between the level of the robot that you are attempting to possess and the level of the one you are currently in control of

assassins roaming around a ten-storey building connected by lifts.

Paradroid was originally intended as a strategy title and not necessarily a shoot 'em up. "The game design for *Paradroid* required a lot of strategy, the shoot 'em up part only came in at the end when my gunsight idea failed," confirms Braybrook. "Originally I had wanted the player to control the Influence Device and a gunsight, alternately. So the player would move, press and hold the button to gain control of the gunsight, move that around to where they wanted to hit, then release the button to fire at that spot. This was fine for hitting static targets, but turned out to be useless when we started to move the robots around."

"I like to keep in touch by going to the ECTS show, but all the people I know who are still in the industry seem to say the same thing, 'It's not the industry it was, don't come back'"

The idea of portraying the gameworld as an abstract blueprint also under went some changes. "It really did work too well, the screen display looked totally flat, as would a piece of paper," says Braybrook. "The bas-relief idea came about because we needed to try and make the screen look more solid and 3D-like. Since I had decided to stick with hi-res two-colour graphics about the only thing you could do was bas-relief!" Whatever the reasons the distinctive design style helped *Paradroid* stand out from the crowd and was successfully expanded on in titles such as *Uridium* and *Morpheus*, becoming one of Graftgold's trademark design features.

Route master

As well as the eight-way scrolling map *Paradroid* was, at the time of its release, also noted for its advanced artificial intelligence with non-combatant robots appearing to go about their business in a believable and logical fashion – rather too logical as it turns out. "In order to make the robots look like they were going about their duties I mapped out routes, like train-tracks, over each deck, taking them through doors and to consoles, but I have to admit that they didn't know what they were doing or have any purpose," admits Braybrook. "What really made a simple algorithm work was the fact that the robots could 'see' ahead of them. Since I already had to work out whether the player could see a robot by direct line of sight, then that information also gave me the angle and distance from the robot back to the player. All this added up to what I called 'Apparent Intelligence'. It shows that it is more important what a player thinks is happening than what is actually going on."

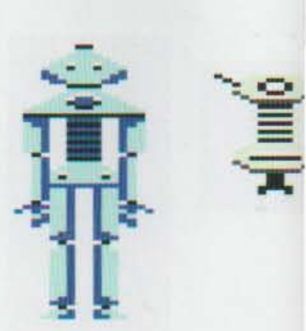
Although a massive critical and, to a degree, commercial success *Paradroid*'s apparent influence on Graftgold's competitors was more moderate. As Braybrook points out,



If the robot you possess is destroyed the Influence Device will survive the initial barrage, allowing you to escape







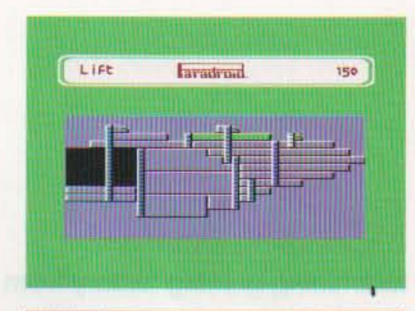
unlike *Uridium* "there were no *Paradroid* clones at the time. I feel because the coding was more complex and less obvious." Indeed it's surprising how even today there are few titles that have plundered the game's various unique features for inspiration, with only Eurocom's *Machine Hunter* standing out as an obvious attempt at an update and a few titles such as *Spacestation Silicon Valley* and *Messiah* borrowing the idea of an Influence Device.

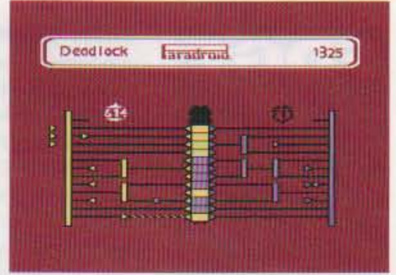
Financial disaster

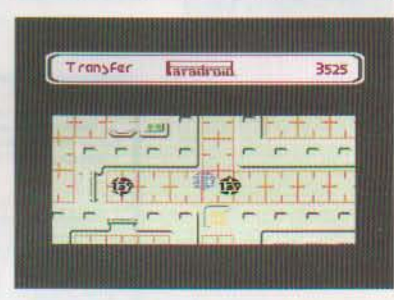
Braybrook carried on with the concept himself though, first producing *Heavy Metal Paradroid* – which increased the game's framerate from 17 frames per second to 25 and used some of the improved graphics techniques from *Morpheus* – and then designing (with coding by Gary Foreman) an aborted twoplayer, *Gauntlet*-style, cooperative version for the PC Engine.

It was at this time that Graftgold's relationship with publisher Hewson began to seriously deteriorate. Although work was finished on the Atari ST/Amiga update *Paradroid 90*, it became obvious that Hewson was not in a fit financial state to publish and market it. "It was a real mistake as the whole thing turned into a farce and a financial disaster for us. We produced the complete game ourselves, receiving no advances, for what appeared to be a better share of the royalties," explains Braybrook. "But just before the game was published we learned that the game was not being published by Hewson at all, but by Activision. Hewson then went into receivership but after having received money from Activision, which we saw none of." To add insult to injury an Amiga 1200 enhanced version published by Empire also failed to provide any remuneration. "That's what you get for helping people out," says a resigned Braybrook.

The jinx of the *Paradroid* update may finally have been broken though with the news that Jester Interactive is about to release a conversion of the C64 original on the GBA. It's also about to start work proper on a PS2 version, on which Braybrook and Turner have already been consulted. It's fair to say though that the business side of games industry is not something that Braybrook recalls with any fondness, "I like to keep in touch by going to the ECTS show, but all the people I know who are still in the industry seem to say the same thing, 'It's not the industry it was, don't come back.'"







Paradroid uses a strict line-of-sight system where neither the player nor the enemy robots can see each other unless they are looking in the right direction





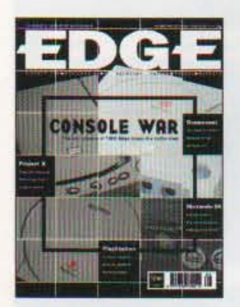
***Paradroid*'s complex coding meant that there were few imitations. Braybrook continued, though, with *Heavy Metal Paradroid* and a version on the PC Engine**

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 62, September 1998

While other magazines sell on the back of exclusive reviews, **Edge** steers clear of the seedy PR brawl and goes straight for the editorial jugular with innovative cover features. Like **E**62's, for example – "WHICH IZ BEST!!! SEGA NINTENDO SONY OR NUON!!! LOL JUST KIDDING ABOUT NUON." Of course, **Edge** is paraphrasing, and it's quite within its remit to report on the implications of four companies going head-to-head. And if you don't want to know the result, look away now: all machines stood a reasonable chance of doing okay, but then again they might not.

Prescreens, then. **Edge**'s first look at *Driver* had its publisher salivating, while *Giants* – described as "an art house game by George Lucas and David Lynch" – looked exactly the same as it would when development would cease; absolutely stunning, and commercially suicidal. *Silent Hill* seemed destined for a more popular place, albeit with the weight of Sony's marketing machine behind it. Oh, and talking of money, what about those reviews? Not much this month, but the back page promised a 'world exclusive' review of *Turok 2* next month. Oh, Reset can hardly wait…

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"**Edge** is hugely optimistic about the future of the Dreamcast," or, "Between its hardware, marketing savvy, and the painful lessons learned from its own history, Sega should be ready for the challenge." Marketing savvy? Still, at least the Dreamcast's inadequacy's are Reset's gain…

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"We may have been the ones that pioneered those overly ample female proportions!" Unsure that Lara's form was entirely Core's own work, Jez San takes credit for huge breasts the world over

TESTSCREENS AND RATINGS:

F-Zero X (N64, 8/10); *Pocket Fighter* (PS, 7/10); *Mission: Impossible* (N64; 4/10), *Hardware* (PC, 8/10); *Deep Fear* (Saturn, 5/10); *Wargames* (PC; 8/10), *Blast Radius* (PS; 6/10), *1080° Snowboarding* (N64, 8/10)



1



2



3



4



5



6

1. *F-Zero X* scores a 8/10 Can Nagoshi-san go one (or two) better with GC? 2. *Seventh Cross*, the first DC prescreen 3. Ex F1 driver Andrea Montermini puts a Joytech Wheel to test. He's no Big Boy, that's for sure 4. Uh oh 5. *Mission: Impossible* – "Easily one of the year's biggest disappointments" 6. The Art of Noise art

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Steve Starvis, PR manager at Eidos, remembers a football game with a twist





Super soccer fan Starvis thinks Super Soccer on the Super Nintendo is a super soccer game

Certainly not the greatest game ever (that's *Super Mario Kart*) but the game that got me hooked on console gaming and started a somewhat unhealthy obsession with Japanese football games was *Super Soccer* by Human for the Super Nintendo.

Super Soccer was the first game to offer a proper arcade football experience. The ability with certain players (Argentina's No.10 & Germany's No.7 if my memory serves me right) to dribble past every player on the pitch was the stuff of schoolboy dreams. To this day no other football game has managed to offer manual keepers that actually worked, even though you had to forget about trying to control your defence as soon as the attacking player got anywhere near your box. Admittedly it was flawed; in the singleplayer game you could only ever score two ways, something which would obviously be totally unacceptable in today's AI-obsessed world. The tackling (or should I say shoulder-barging) wasn't the most subtle and things could get clogged up in midfield. The twist at the end after winning what you thought was the final is easily on par with the end of 'The Usual Suspects'.

The ref running on, nicking the trophy and having to beat his team to reclaim my reward was pure drama. Now only if those D-pads on Virgin's in-flight entertainment system worked properly…



Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

In E123 you respond to Andrew Mersdon's letter with the point that there are now an unacceptable number of games that feature "design flaws that are obvious and easily corrected." A seemingly innocuous observation but it's stuck with me. In fact, it has roused a long simmering grievance. I can think of two particular examples: *Project Gotham Racing* and *TimeSplitters2*.

Project Gotham was, in most respects, a terrific game utterly blighted by the most hideous flaw. When taking a corner, even with a respectable racing line, if you are so much as grazed from behind by another car, that's it, a full-on spin into the barriers and race over. What's the point of playing if you're fatally punished for no reason at all?

Likewise, *TimeSplitters2* is a sterling effort but wait… it's a firstperson shooter and I can't hear the sound of my footfalls. There *is* no sound of footfalls in the game. I can't hear myself walk therefore I'm not there and if I'm not there then the point of playing the game is entirely negated.

These are small but critical issues that surely, surely should have been picked up in playtesting, feedback, Q&A, etc. I humbly suggest that **Edge** investigate the murky world of playtesting. How do such appalling blunders make it past the testers? How does the testing system work? Who are they? Is it uncommon to have 30 play testers as *Resident Evil 0* did? Are Japanese games playtested more rigorously, thus explaining their generally superior degree of polish?
Jake Michie

Rest assured, the issue of playtesting is one that **Edge** has intended to explore for a while now. In particular the degree to which apparently inconsequential flaws and glitches make it past batteries of testers, but also to explore the differences between testing for bugs and testing for design flaws, and the differences in attitudes to testing between western developers and their Japanese counterparts.

I want to ask a question. As a multiformat magazine, there seems to be something wrong with **Edge** only reviewing (or testing) one version of a game. Clearly, a game can not be exactly the same on all three main consoles. I am aware that a number of releases recently have provided different or updated content depending on the platform it is being developed for (*Burnout 2*, for example, or *Soul Calibur 2*). Now, I know in some cases, **Edge** acknowledges this in a review (the *Soul Calibur 2* review for example). However, this is not always the case and I often see a review of a game for a variety of formats, yet it has only been tested on one platform.

Surely, this must mean that **Edge** readers may not be getting the full picture? Yes, I imagine if a game's basic gameplay structure or camera is screwed in one version, it will be screwed in all of them. But when it comes to graphical nuances, framerate issues or draw distances, one version might be poor on one platform, but it might be great in another (compare the Xbox version of *Metal Gear Solid 2* to the PS2 version, for example). Surely it would be better to note somewhere in a review if there are significant differences between platforms. I know that, occasionally **Edge** does this, but not always. Is it a new thing that can be included in the future?

Also, please can you include an archives section on your Website (and sort out the lack of a forum). I finally have decided to get a next-gen console and it is hard to decide which one to go for and which games to buy if I can't find out previous views on old games. I know you have started to provide a re-cap of recent reviews in the front of **Edge**; if this could be stored online somewhere for future reference, that would be great.
Rupert Plumridge

Edge's reviews only make note of the differences between the various platform versions of a multiformat release if these are significant. If they are then they will be remarked upon in the review or the game will reviewed more than once (as in your example of *Metal Gear Solid 2*, due to versions being ready or released at different times).

As for your archive/forum request: we are investigating the possibility of offering our readers an archive, though not necessarily on our Website.

I have just read your magazine for the first time (**E**124). To be totally honest, if I hadn't been considering the acquisition of a console for my birthday I most probably would not have picked up **Edge** or any other videogame magazine due to the very masculine cover designs presented to me. The videogame industry is very obviously male oriented and it is not difficult to see why it hasn't attracted more interest from any potential female audience.

My first experience with videogames occurred during the '80s when I was bought my first computer, an Amiga. My brother's friend gave me some games to play on it and the two games that most captured my attention were an early version of *SimCity* and a platform fighting game which had the option of choosing a female hero. Of the former I felt great satisfaction in causing total destruction of my little world and of the latter I was immensely proud of my achievement at completing the game (with the female hero all the way).

My interest waned as I went through my teens but then resumed when I was 19 and I purchased a Game Boy Color. I chose the pink one, my favourite colour and have enjoyed playing a variety of games since, with my favourites being fighting genres. I now have borrowing rights over a Game Boy Advance in which I immerse myself with *Sonic Advance*, *Mario Kart* and *Street Fighter*.

When I started thinking about getting a console I went and bought a few games magazines to research my options and although I enjoy reading them and find the reviews informative I do feel a certain sense of isolation when I come to the letters pages and see that most, if not all, of the letters are from males; it seems as if I'm the only female who reads the magazine.

The very evident masculinity of videogame

> "The masculinity of videogame shops is unwelcoming to the female market and with advertising like the GBA SP ads the exclusion of female consumers is only going to continue"



Tracing the ideological lineage of titles like *Stunt Car Racer* is hardly an exact science but **Edge** isn't entirely convinced by comparisons to *Hard Drivin'*

shops and magazines can be unwelcoming to the female market and with advertising like the Game Boy Advance SP ads (and the tagline 'For Men') the exclusion of female consumers from the market is only going to continue. My plea to developers and marketers of videogame products is to explore your feminine side; only then will you get the financial benefit of a large potential market that is currently being lost.
Helen Beeston

The videogame industry's resolute failure to attract audiences outside of its current, very narrow, target demographic is a perennial issue in these pages. Hopefully, as more females join the industry, either as employees or as consumers, publishers will be forced to revise their conservative stances.

I couldn't help but raise an eyebrow at the Geoff Crammond 'Making of...' feature in **E**125. I am old enough to have been in the fledgling consumer games industry at that point and had actually been around Geoff and those in the industry during those traumatic times, mainly from the other side of the table.

But I was shocked to read no mention in all of the detailed recollection of the design process that gave us *Stunt Car Racer*, or any mention of the Atari Games arcade product *Hard Drivin'* launched in 1988 or its successor *Race Drivin'* in 1989. At the time it was very obvious that Crammond's game was a direct rip-off, if not greatly influenced by the presentational style and gameplay of the coin-op. A common trend, and though slightly dubious, common practice in the '80s UK gaming scene.

I am against rewriting history to try to paper over what really went into creating a game. As an amusement archivist myself, along with being an occasional writer, I am concerned that the circulation of this sort of revisionist history is becoming all too common, from Nintendo's changing *Donkey Kong* story, to Konami/Sega's *Frogger* story. Books like 'Game Over', though detailed have to toe the corporate line to get those juicy interviews, and sadly perpetuate the myth rather than relay the truth of the time (whatever that may have been).

One last point: Having worked for Infogrames, I was aware of the Hasbro/Microprose acquisition and the management sentiment towards Geoff and the *F1* team. To say, "For this reason he (Geoff) has opted to collaborate with UK development team Lost Toys..." rather than work on the latest *Grand Prix* title, plays on the audience's ignorance of the actual facts about why the corporation changed its involvement with Geoff's operation.
Kevin Williams

The history of the transmission of ideas and creative influence is one that is difficult to pin down or quantify. To **Edge**'s eye, the influence owed by *Stunt Car Racer* to *Hard Drivin'* and *Race Drivin'* isn't as pronounced as you suggest, and unless you have any concrete evidence to the contrary, **Edge** would be remiss to assert any concrete connection between the games.

The relationship between Geoff Crammond and Infogrames is a rather more interesting point; it's clear that there are always going to be two sides to stories about any such falling out, though perhaps in this instance **Edge** was in fact remiss not to point them both out.

I thought the Jason Rubin article in **Equip** brought up some interesting points regarding character; in particularly the reasons why he chose to drop such a well established piece of IP as Crash Bandicoot for his PlayStation2 platformer. He stated that the character of Crash was not designed to be able to speak, he was not designed to have too much direction, and as such, he would not fit into the *Jak and Daxter* games where the desires of the characters go a little further and are a touch more complex.

He then went on to mention that these limitations that apply to Crash also extend to Mario and Sonic. Sonic was designed with a single characteristic in mind; he was meant to be fast. When Sonic Team took the decision to make him speak, many people, including myself, wished that he'd just shut up. Sega may have wanted him to be a streetwise lowdown dirty ghetto pimp, but I certainly had never imagined him like that. And so for me, the character of Sonic has somewhat lost its appeal in recent years.

And what of Mario? So far Nintendo has managed to steer well clear of adding anything to the stereotypical Italian formula that has served it so well. Ever wondered the real reason why the mansion is Luigi's? I'd suggest that it's because Nintendo doesn't want to dedicate any characteristics to Mario at all – even fear. He needs to be a clean slate in order to work, and by work I mean appeal to all. The character of Mario is a total non-event. The only reason he's so well-loved is because he stars in the world's best games. Would it really make that much difference to the playing experience if *Super Mario Sunshine* was *Captain Olimar Sunshine*?

This should be worrying Nintendo. As games become more complex, character direction and desire is becoming more and more important. How much longer are people going to want to play as a character whose main characteristics are the fact that he's fat and has slightly camp facial hair?
Jason Scott

Sonic a "streetwise lowdown dirty ghetto pimp"? **Edge** must have missed that episode. Although Rubin's undoubtedly got a point, **Edge** would argue that *Super Mario Sunshine*'s a better game than *Jak and Daxter* (which is still an excellent platformer), and that's more important than how far the lead characters of each game were explicitly designed to be capable of emotional variety.

So *Mario 128* is "too innovative" for it to have been shown at E3 says Nintendo. Wow, how exciting is that? Or at least how exciting would it have been several years ago. I would argue with some confidence that this innovation is almost

"Sega may have wanted Sonic The Hedgehog to be a streetwise lowdown dirty ghetto pimp, but I certainly had never imagined him like that"



Metroid Prime: would you buy this game on the recommendation of **Edge**? What if we hadn't given it a score out of ten? Anyway, you ought to, it's ace

bound to use the GBA/GameCube link-up cable. But as Xbox bigwig Peter Moore said, "Someone's yet to explain to me the value of hooking up your handheld device to your console," and after seeing the ridiculous *Pac-Man* being shown at E3 I would have to agree. The once golden Kyoto publisher has been sinking into a giant pit of its own making for the last seven years and doesn't look like it's going to be able to extricate itself anytime soon.

Not only do I still get angry with its mistreatment of Europe (add another four months to the European release date of any title, if indeed there is one) but also its unflinching determination to not listen to consumers. Given that each Nintendo title takes about two years to come out the next lot of big selling sequels (Mario, Samus, Zelda) are likely to be the last for the system before the 2005 release of its next console.

With thirdparty support currently weak there is going to be a massive drought of games for the system. Before any Nintendo loyalists condemn my sentence on thirdparty support, tell me why the GameCube receives multiformat titles at least two months after the other two consoles. For someone that owns two consoles the choice is clear, don't bother waiting for the Cube version.

Perhaps the GameCube will eventually come to be known as the DreamCube for making the same mistakes as Sega. I do hope Nintendo's next console will wipe the floor with the competition, but then I remember saying that about the GameCube.
Dylan Bevan

Nintendo's attitude towards Europe is a continuing source of woe for anyone with the company's interests at heart, but **Edge** would be very surprised if the 'innovative' feature of the recently announced *Mario 128*'s will be limited to GBA connectivity – although there's no doubting Nintendo's ability to surprise. As an aside, *Pac-Man* is far from ridiculous; **Edge** rather likes it.

As far as games as artform goes, where are the games with the emotional resonance or cultural relevance to match the great works of art or film of the last century? Well, we already have games that can claim to have deeper meaning. *Grand Theft Auto III* could be read as a satire of the violence-obsessed attitude of western society today. But because of the way in which the game was marketed, playing the game on anything other than a literal level probably never entered the minds of most gamers. Or there's the likes of *Ico*, in which there is a genuine and heartfelt emotional connection with the characters.

But why aren't new games taking these precedents further? Well art such as paintings are the work and vision of a single person, and many of the best films around are the work of auteurs. But while other artforms are the work of a single mind, games involve many people from the conception of the idea of the game itself, to the design of the graphics, to the coding, etc. All of whom brings a different vision to the game, diluting or straying from the original intention.

Money also undoubtedly plays a part and most publishers seem to be focusing on tried and tested concepts in the hope satisfying company shareholders. But why the obsession with games as art anyway? Games were originally merely electronic representations of board games or sports; one certainly wouldn't try to read any deep meaning into a game of 'Monopoly' or tennis.

If games are to progress further, maybe a new direction is needed. But what direction?
bulletproof_cupid

Although in recent years the visual arts have been largely the preserve of solitary artists, most major Renaissance pieces were in fact the work of sizeable workshops, staffed by artists who were considered little more than interior decorators. Movies too have been collaborative efforts since the earliest days of film, and few directors would be as successful had they not allied their talents to those of skilled editors and cinematographers. The fact that videogames are another collaborative creative endeavour should certainly be no bar to the heights of artistic and cultural respectability. And perhaps that's the heart of the matter: Yes, games are a form of entertainment, as are the visual arts and cinema. But a degree of cultural respectability might have the capacity to extend the reach and evolve the form for the better.

I know you're going to have plenty of correspondence concerning **E**124 and the temporary removal of scores but here's another one anyway. Although I understand **Edge**'s reasoning I disagree with removing scores altogether.

Not having a score to reference means that your readership is relying on truly understanding the words put down by your reviewers. But it's inevitable that everyone interprets things slightly differently. If, for example, you asked five artists to read the same novel and draw their idea of the main character you would end up with five very different drawings.

For those of us with limited time or money to play games, making the correct purchase is essential, and misinterpreting your review could cost us £40–£50 which could have been spent on a better game. The score is as important as the text and neither should be missing, whether you put them at the end of the review or not. You migh also want to consider a ban on reviewing games the day after a Sony/Nintendo/Microsoft PR party as we don't want hangovers slurring the wording on a crucial review.

Finally, a score is a useful reference for quick purchases. **E**119 has just come through the post on a Friday and I want a new game for the weekend. *Metroid Prime* has received a score of nine and, since I know all about the game from previews I can go out and get it safe in the knowledge that it's a good game.
Shaun Satterthwaite

But your argument, that the words are relative, surely applies to the numerical scores too?

"Nintendo has been sinking into a giant pit of its own making for the last seven years and doesn't look like it's going to be able to extricate itself anytime soon"

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